KENT AND SUSSEX

BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS

FRANK BUFFARD

Kent and Sussex Baptist Associations

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BAPTIST ASSOCIATION life in Kent and Sussex began more than three hundred years ago when the General Baptist churches of Kent united to form the "Kentish Association". The story of the developments which followed provides a fascinating picture of Baptist life in Kent and Sussex through three centuries. It also gives a picture of Baptist life over a wider field, for the beliefs and practices and, with few exceptions, the difficulties and achievements of the Baptists in the South East were common to all the Baptist communities in the land.

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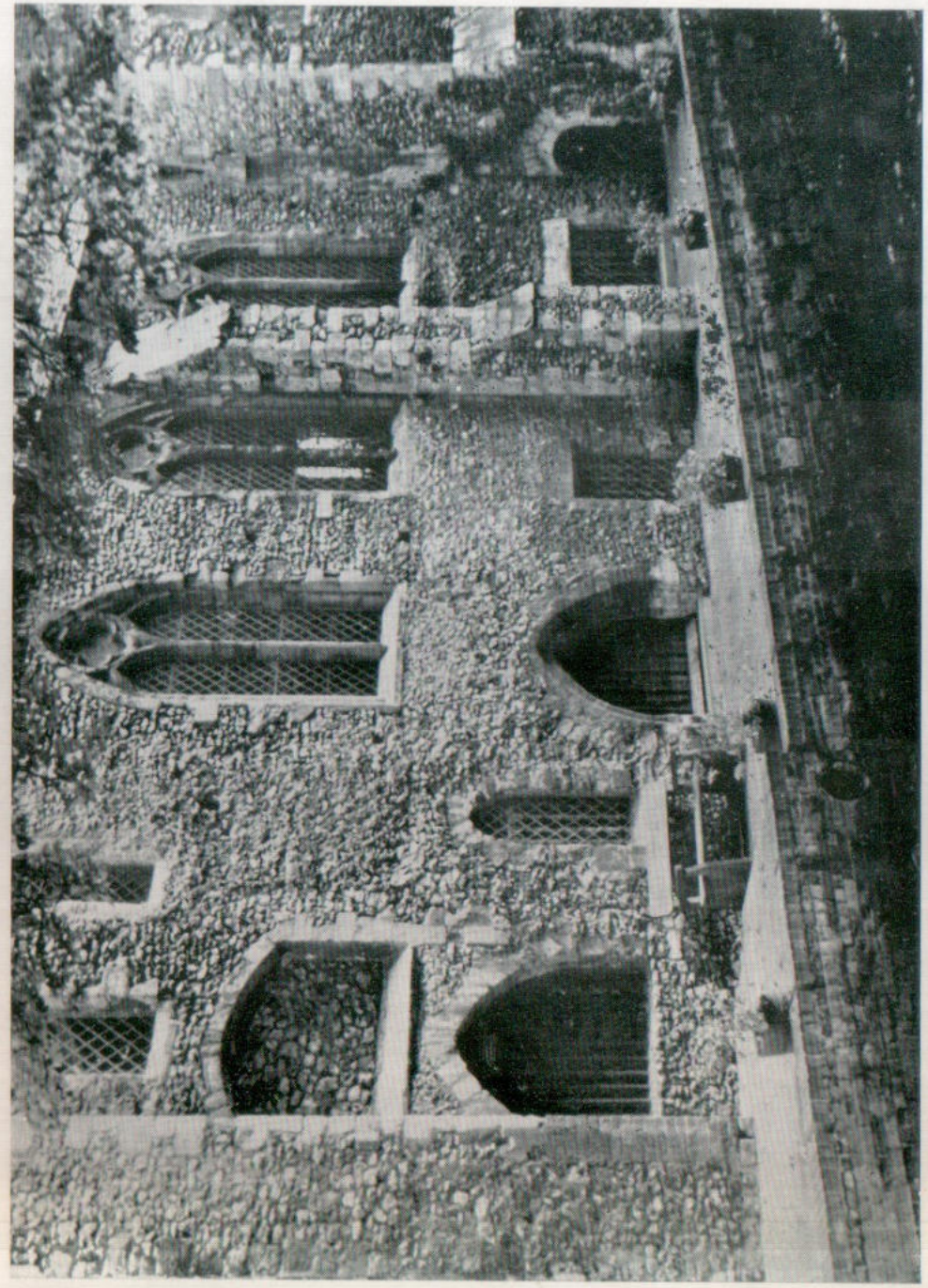

THE BLACK FRIARS' REFECTORY
meeting place of Canterbury Baptists from at least 1695-1891

KENT AND SUSSEX BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS

By

FRANK BUFFARD

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Photographs by T. A. H. Getley

FOREWORD

FEW parts of the country have a longer, more varied or more complicated Baptist history than Kent and Sussex. It begins with "Anabaptists" in the sixteenth century, some of them from the Continent of Europe, some native-born. It includes the two main theological streams represented by "Generals" and "Particulars" and a succession of remarkable characters, some insistently orthodox, others as insistently heretical, all of them characteristically Baptist.

The careful study of local and county history, with special attention to the significant but constantly changing pattern of Association life, is one of the great needs for a true understanding of our Baptist tradition and convictions. Baptist witness is an essential part of the story of the Christian faith in this land and deserves as scholarly record and preservation as that of Churches which have had larger numbers of adherents and greater material resources.

The following pages show how well the Rev. Frank Buffard has served not only the Baptists of Kent and Sussex, who asked him to prepare this volume, but also all those interested in Baptist history. His task has been no easy one. He has carried it out most conscientiously and with skill and sympathy.

This is an unfinished tale. Of recent decades the Kent and Sussex Association has undertaken many new enterprises within its own borders. It has also contributed to and influenced developments throughout the denomination. There is more here than the record of what is past and gone. There is inspiration for the present and the future.

Ernest A. Payne.

Baptist Church House,
July 1963.

PREFACE

THIS history was written at the request of the Kent and Sussex Association. This Association began as an independent body in 1835, but research soon made it plain that its origins lay much further back. Three of its member churches, Ashford, Eythorne and Smarden, can trace an unbroken line for more than 300 years and many of its older churches are linked with earlier Baptist churches from which they seceded. That is why space has been given to tracing the early years of Baptist life in Kent and Sussex. Otherwise the picture would have been incomplete.

The task of unravelling the tangled skein of Baptist churches and organisations has proved absorbing and fascinating. It will be speedily evident that this is not the work of a trained historian, and I fear that it is almost inevitable that there should be some errors in a book so full of detail in spite of all the care that has been taken to ensure accuracy. But I hope that church members, for whom these pages were written, will find here a clear and trustworthy record of Kent and Sussex Baptist life and that the pleasure they find in reading it will equal the pleasure experienced in its writing.

There are many to whom thanks are due: to Dr. E. A. Payne for his counsel, for his thorough and helpful examination of the typescript and for his Foreword; to the Rev. T. A. H. Getley, who undertook the responsibility for the illustrations; to the many ministers, church secretaries and others who sent me the records of their churches; to some who readily gave time and care in gathering particular items of information for which I asked; and not least to the Librarians of at least ten Libraries who, without exception, were interested and most helpful.

FRANK BUFFARD.

CHAPTER I

THE FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF PREPARATION

IN 1612 a small group of Baptists, under the leadership of Thomas Helwys, left Amsterdam for London and settled down in Spitalfields, outside the city wall. There they established the first Baptist church on English soil. In 1657 there was in Kent a well established Association of Baptist churches. It is with the forty-five years between these events that this chapter is concerned.

The conversion of England to Protestantism was substantially effected during the reign of Elizabeth I. By the time of her death in 1603, the majority of Englishmen regarded themselves as Protestants and a great number were living lives based on the Bible and the Prayer Book. Religious people, apart from the comparatively small body of Roman Catholics, were divided into three main groups. In the Established Church there were the Episcopalians, who believed that the Church should be governed by Bishops, and the Presbyterians, who believed that Presbyters (i.e., Elders) should govern. The latter were Puritans who thought that the Reformation had not gone far enough, but they had no thought of leaving the Anglican Church and hoped to reform it from within. The third group, also Puritan, were the Separatists. They had come to believe that it was hopeless to stay inside and work for reform. They therefore left the Anglican Communion and sought to build a church on the New Testament pattern. They discarded the idea that all persons in the parish were members of the Church and believed that repentance and faith were essential to membership. From this group arose the Independents, later to be called Congregationalists, and the Baptists. There is ample evidence that many had carried

the Separatist idea of membership to its logical conclusion in believers' baptism.

The official religion was Episcopal, and in an intolerant age those who held other convictions were persecuted. James I supported the Bishops and refused all pleas for toleration. Hopes raised by the promises of Charles I before he came to the throne in 1625 proved vain. His chief adviser, Archbishop Laud, was determined to stamp out all who did not conform with the Anglican Church. Presbyterian, Separatist and Baptist suffered crippling fines and rigorous, sometimes fatal, imprisonment. It was not until 1640 that growing resentment against the King and his counsellors brought a period of freedom to Dissenters. For almost thirty years the Baptists were a persecuted people.

This was the situation when Helwys settled in London. The small company had passed through many troubled waters before returning to English soil. They were members of a Separatist church in Lincolnshire. Persecution drove them to seek religious freedom in Amsterdam in 1608. John Smyth, their elder, became convinced that only the baptism of believers was Scriptural baptism, and in addition he discarded the Calvinist doctrine of a limited salvation. In 1612 Helwys, a Puritan of godly parentage and a man of substance and education, and ten other members, found themselves in disagreement with Smyth and separated from the main group. Shortly afterwards they returned to this land, convinced that they had been wrong to retreat before persecution because "thousands of ignorant souls in our country are perishing for lack of instruction."

This first Baptist church was a General Baptist church. The distinction between General and Particular Baptists has little interest for most twentieth century Baptists, but it held a dominant position in the seventeenth century and onwards and has constantly to be kept in mind. The Particular Baptists had a different origin from the General Baptists and they had not been in touch with the Continental Ana-baptists. In 1616 a group of Independents established a church in London. The proper subject of baptism was often discussed in this period, with the result that several members accepted the baptism of believers and were dismissed in friendly fashion to form a church of their own. There were also subsequent

secessions from which Particular Baptist churches arose. The exact date of the formation of the first Particular Baptist church is uncertain, except that it was between 1633 and 1638. By 1644 there were at least seven Particular Baptist churches in London, for these seven issued a Confession of Faith to make clear their position in face of calumny.

The central beliefs of the General Baptists, stated in their various Confessions of Faith, are summarised in Hebrews vi: 1, 2, viz: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment. The Particular Baptists held these same beliefs, and both groups believed and proclaimed that the baptism of the repentant and the believing was the only baptism known in the New Testament. There were differences in minor matters of usage and belief, but it was on Calvinism that the seventeenth century Baptists were crucially divided. The Particular Baptists had not discarded Calvin's belief that God had predestined some to salvation and some to damnation, and therefore Christ's death was not efficacious for all. The earlier Baptists, however, followed the teaching of Arminius, the Dutch Reformed theologian who was the leading opponent of Calvin's doctrine of election. They insisted that the Divine Sovereignty was compatible with real free will in man, that Christ died for all men and not only for the elect. It is for these reasons that the term "general" was applied to them, in contrast to the Calvinistic Baptists who believed that only "particular" people were saved.

For nearly 250 years these two main streams of Baptist life flowed separately. There was little active hostility between them, but attempts at co-operation were shortlived. It was not until 1891 that they were united. The division between them creates many difficulties for the historian, which matters little. What is important is the degree to which their separation must have weakened their Christian witness. In Kent and Sussex for a long period there were two Associations meeting in successive months.

The Calvinism of the Particular Baptists brought them a more favourable reception from their fellow countrymen than the General Baptists received. To move from Independency to the Baptist position was to change their views only on the proper subject and mode of Baptism. They could retain their Calvinism, their independency and their beliefs concerning

orders in the local church. Thus in the country as a whole they soon outstripped the General Baptists, but in Kent and Sussex the latter were predominant for more than a century.

From this necessary digression we return to the Spitalfields church. From the beginning it was an evangelistic church. Dr. Whitley writes of Helwys that "he seems to deserve the sole credit for discerning and practising that a Christian church should bear witness to the truth, nay, that it is its primary duty, for the sake of which it was created". Helwys began to witness in speech and writing immediately after his return to England. As a result King James put him in Newgate prison. No more is known of him except that four years later he was no longer living. His example fired those who came after him and in spite of all the powers of Church and State "they went everywhere preaching the word". Their chief agents in evangelism were personal witness, the printed word, the preaching of pastors and other appointed persons and the work of the Messenger.

The personal witness of individual to individual, unorganised and springing from the believer's love for Christ and men, has always played a large part in Baptist work. In numerous villages of Kent and Sussex, and four-fifths of the population lived in villages, small groups of Baptists were gathered together by this means and these were to become the foundation members of the churches that were formed when persecution ceased.

Effective use was made of the printed word. One of Laud's repressive measures was an Act which made it necessary to receive a licence for any publication. This did not prevent a certain amount of clandestine printing, but print came into its own from 1640 to 1659. In these years a spate of pamphlets was issued, almost all of them religious, and they were read eagerly. There was no "light" literature, no printed newspaper, and interest in religion was widespread. Baptism was frequently dealt with in these pamphlets and this led to public debates on the subject. Sometimes these were between two local antagonists but often they were on a wider and more organised scale. Speakers were chosen carefully, often from a distance, and some person of standing in the neighbourhood

would preside. Most of the early evangelists shared in these exchanges.

But the most effective method was by preaching. Those who were duly appointed and ordained as Elders to a church (whom we today should call ministers) administered the sacraments and preached the Word. They did not confine their preaching to their own church. Most, if not all, were ardent evangelists, going out into the villages and towns around them and there building up believing communities. In addition to the elders there were others who preached. Repeatedly the churches are asked to be watchful to discern any of their membership who had a gift for preaching, to encourage them and to make opportunities for them to exercise their gift. If finally approved by the church, they were set apart solemnly by the church for this work of preaching, but not for the administration of the sacraments. Preaching by anyone not commissioned by his church was sternly frowned upon. The ministry of the Word was so highly esteemed that it was deemed essential for the preacher to be tested and approved by his fellow members, lest that ministry fall into disrepute. These preachers were called ministers for many years, but it was a local ministry.

In earlier years much of the effective evangelism was done by "Messengers". It was noted that in the New Testament, in addition to the elders and deacons who ministered to the local church, there were men like Barnabas, Timothy and Titus who were set apart for a wider ministry. They were travelling missionaries, establishing, organising and over-seeing churches. Therefore the early General Baptists appointed men for this kind of work and used the Scriptural name "messenger" to describe them (e.g., Phil. ii: 25). They were usually nominated from among the elders of a group of churches, which would share the support of the messenger and his family. The Association, and sometimes the Annual Assembly in London, was asked to give their approval. If this were granted, they were solemnly ordained by prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands. It was largely through the work of messengers that the churches were founded which formed the first Baptist Association in Kent. They came into their own in 1640 when freedom of movement and public gatherings became possible.

One of the messengers to evangelise Kent came from outside

the area. He was Henry Denne, a curate in Hertfordshire, who became convinced that the baptism of infants was unscriptural. He was baptised and joined the church of Thomas Lamb, a minister of a General Baptist church in London. Lamb was an eager evangelist and was several times imprisoned for his fearless witness. It was probably he who commissioned Denne for a missionary tour in Kent. He preached at Rochester Cathedral, Chatham and other places on the way, baptising many at each of them. He settled at Canterbury for a time, evangelising in the district. It may well be that he was responsible for the General Baptist church which was formed in the city in 1645. Denne paid another visit in 1655, helping the Canterbury church and touring the coastal and inland districts.

The church at Eythorne was formed about this time. There was probably a group of Baptists there before this but there is no evidence of a definite church, with choice and recognition of officers, before 1653.

In 1643 some men from Dover were baptised in Canterbury when "some Baptists from London came to the city", and in the same year a church was formed in Dover. They had a meeting-house as early as 1655, a rarity in the days when men met in houses, sheds and barns. There was little money for building and a conventicle made too obvious a target for persecuting zeal.

There was certainly a Baptist church in Ashford in 1653 and there is some evidence that it is older than this. Their oldest existing church book is dated May 21st, 1689. In the fly-leaf these words are gummed, "This church appears from papers and from the church book to be of ancient date in the year 1653".

Maidstone had long been a stronghold of dissent. In Laud's report to the King in 1634 on the strength of non-conformity, it is stated that "there were divers professed Separatists" at Maidstone and "much non-conformity had of late years spread in the neighbourhood". Some of these dissenters were Baptists, for there was a General Baptist church there during the Protectorate. The name of Joseph Wright (1623-1703) will always be associated with this church. He was "a man of great learning and piety", and there are indications that he "practised physick".[1] He was an outstanding figure in the General Assembly and one of the foremost defenders against heresy.

At the other end of our Association area James Sicklemore evangelised in West Sussex and Hampshire. He was vicar of Singleton, near Chichester, when in 1648 he rejected infant baptism. One of the causes he founded was a Baptist church in Chichester. He was ordained a messenger in 1654.

Another early Baptist church in Sussex was at Horsham. It was in this church that Matthew Caffyn (1628-1714) worked for many years. When at Oxford he was imprisoned for the doctrines he held and when released he returned to his native county and settled as a tenant farmer at Southwater, near Horsham. There he joined the Baptist church, under Samuel Lover, to whom he was soon appointed as colleague. He was a man of abounding energy and crusading zeal and became a great influence in Sussex and Kent. He was present with James Sicklemore at the first General Assembly of General Baptist churches in London in 1654, and for nearly fifty years proved to be the stormy petrel of the Assembly's deliberations. There were many smaller groups of Baptists in the county though not yet formed into churches and many of these Baptists were sorely persecuted when Charles II came to the throne, notably in Ditchling and Lewes.

The centre of our area produced a notable evangelist in William Jeffrey. He was born in Penshurst in 1616, and moved in early manhood to Bradburn, an estate on the outskirts of Sevenoaks. Cottage meetings were held in 1640 and in 1642 a church was formed, under the leadership of John Reeve and William Jeffrey. When persecution increased the church moved to the remote village of Bessels Green, worshipping in private houses until 1716 when their first meeting-house was built.

Jeffery also built up a church about Spelding and Pembury, "which he settled in good order, and ordained John Clare to be the elder thereof, which is the same that now meeteth at Tunbridge Wells". He and his brother were responsible for establishing over twenty churches in Kent, all of which were existing in 1728, according to Adam Taylor.

Among other places Jeffery was active in the Cranbrook area. He strongly influenced Richard Kingsnorth, a church warden who lived at Spilshill Court, behind Staplehurst Parish Church, and from 1640 Baptist services were held in his home. Linked with this company was a group worshipping at Smarden. In

1640 these two groups united in one church of eighty-four members. Their names are preserved in the Smarden church records. For nearly 200 years this church was known as "the church meeting in Smarden and Spilshill". It drew its members from thirty parishes, including Headcorn, Tenterden, Hawkhurst and Biddenden.

These were some of the churches formed in the brief years of respite from persecution, and there are others. Before 1640 there were groups of Baptists in many places in Kent and Sussex, but it is very doubtful whether any Baptist church was formed before then. Yet twenty years later there were churches formed in most of the larger centres of population, most of them reaching out to a wide circle of villages and hamlets, creating a network of Baptist life which covered considerable areas in the two counties. All of the churches mentioned were General Baptist churches, and it is out of these that the first Kentish Association was formed. To this we now turn.

CHAPTER II

THE 1657 KENTISH ASSOCIATION AND THE RENEWAL OF PERSECUTION

FROM the beginning the Baptist churches co-operated with each other. The first five Baptist churches united for five years in carrying on a correspondence with the Mennonite churches in N. Holland. The Particular Baptists, in their first Confession of Faith in 1644, rejected total independency. Article 47 reads: " . . . particular congregations are distinct bodies, everyone as a compact and knit city within itself; yet are all to walk by one rule of faith; also they are to have help and counsel one of another . . . as members of one body, in the common faith, under Christ the head". This recognition of unity is revealed in a number of ways. A messenger is chosen by a group of churches and in their name does the work of an evangelist; a church selects its minister, usually from within its own membership, but before he could exercise his office the normal practice was that the one chosen must be examined and ordained by neighbouring elders; there was also a marked tendency for small groups of believers in a district to remain one church, though worshipping in several places, rather than to break up into separate churches.

It was inevitable that these experiences of unity should find further expression in larger, regional groups. During the Civil War counties had joined together in voluntary organisations for protection against Royalist exactions and to raise funds and men for the Parliamentary cause. To these they gave the name of Associations. The Baptist churches began to organise on similar lines and before the Protectorate ended churches throughout the country were gathered into Associations. Berkshire formed one in 1652 and the Western churches sent representatives to meet at Wells in 1653, and this was not their

first meeting. The main purposes were mutual encouragement, to provide guidance and help where these were needed, to guard against heresy, to act as conciliators when disputes arose, and to plan for more effective work. They disclaimed any coercive authority, seeing their function as that of adviser rather than ruler, but their moral authority was strong, and from the beginning the churches looked to their Associations for counsel and aid.

The first record of an Association in Kent or Sussex is the account of two Kentish Association gatherings of General Baptist churches in 1657. In early days the Associations rarely had permanent officers or kept minute books. Churches were asked to keep their own record of Association proceedings, and the account of these Kentish Association meetings is taken from the minute book of an early General Baptist church in Tunbridge Wells. The preamble reads: "Severall particulars debated and agreed upon by the Messengers, Elders and Brethren at a quarterly meeting at Chatham upon ye 10th day of ye 1st month of 1657". One minute concerns the messenger's office. It urges the churches to take "all possible care in propagating ye Gospel by Imploying ye Messengers in ye work of ye Lord Jesus Christ", and desires "ye deacons to take speciall care not only of ye Messengers but also of their families in thier absence". Another matter discussed was the lawfulness of engaging in war, and it was decided that it was lawful, but exceeding dangerous to the Christian life. The Association also laid down the dictum that there should be no communion with churches that practise mixed communion, i.e., communion with those not baptised as believers. The Particular Baptists left this to the judgment of the individual church.

The second Quarterly meeting was held in March at Biddenden. It records a number of questions asked by the churches and the decisions arrived at by the Association. "Gifted members of churches may not go forth to preach by their own appointment . . . without the approbation of their own church." "Members are not commonly to leave their own congregation to go to other churches to hear the Word without the assent of their own congregation." This record is interesting not only because of the nature of the questions asked but because it reveals that the churches regard the Association as the right body to turn to for counsel.

It is not known how many member churches there were. The situation of the three named, Biddenden, Chatham and Tunbridge Wells, shows that the Association covered a considerable area. At least 19 Baptist groups in Kent wrote to nominate a member for the Parliament which Cromwell formed in 1653 after dissolving the Rump of the Long Parliament. Neither is it known when the Association was founded. It was clearly well established by 1657. The churches have elders and messengers; they have had time to become accustomed to bringing their problems to their brethren; and there were among the elders men experienced in General Baptist teaching. So it was founded some years before 1657 and probably continued till 1659. In that year the Long Parliament resumed its sessions and its intolerance against all that was not Presbyterian forced the cessation of all Association meetings. Nonconformity was about to enter on thirty years of almost continuous persecution which was ended by the Toleration Act under William and Mary in 1689.

The General Baptists completed their system of regional Associations by holding an annual Assembly in London for all the General Baptist churches. The first Assembly was held in 1654 "to consider how the affairs of the Gospel of Christ, as far as it concerns them, might be best promoted". William Jeffery and Richard Kingsnorth from Kent, and James Sicklemore and Matthew Caffyn from Sussex were present. The General Baptists placed a high value on the Assembly meetings. The Particular Baptists were less convinced of the worth of an Assembly. Their primary emphasis was on Association life where the churches could more easily meet together.

The churches under persecution 1659-1689.

In March, 1660, Parliament called Charles II to the throne. His return was welcome to most of the nation, including the majority of Baptists. They had experienced the repressive hand of Presbyterianism when in power and they found hope in the King's promise of "liberty of conscience in matters not affecting the peace of the Kingdom". Their hopes were shortlived. Whatever may have been Charles' motives in desiring toleration, he was helpless before the bitter reaction to Puritan dominance. A Parliament composed of Cavaliers and Episcopalians, who had suffered sorely in the past decade, was more

bent upon revenge than conciliation. The well known succession of Acts was passed to force the Presbyterians into conformity, Acts which weighed with equal heaviness on Baptists as on all dissenters.

The enforcement of these Acts depended largely on the character and outlook of the local Justices. Some enforced the law with heartless brutality and penalties far beyond the legal limit were imposed. Others administered the law, but more justly. The Acts affected both church members and ministers. The Corporation Act debarred all noncomformists from sharing in local government, and the Conventicle Act made worship a dangerous occupation. Yet the heaviest penalties fell upon the nonconforming clergy. The result of the Act of Uniformity is well known. Nearly 2,000 clergy were evicted, losing home and livelihood. Almost 700 of these were men who had been placed in incumbencies during Cromwell's reign. Nearly 400 Independents and a few Baptists were among them, including John Bunyan. It was inevitable that these should be replaced by episcopal clergy. It was less predictable that there would be some 1,300 Puritan clergy who were willing to go out into poverty and homelessness for conscience sake, even as many episcopal clergyman had done in the previous twenty years. Some of the evicted clergy joined Separatist churches but more gathered their own congregations for worship and teaching, in spite of the heavy penalties for holding conventicles.

It was not long before the fines began to flow into the coffers of the authorities and the prisons became full. The Domestic State Papers show that at the end of 1662 there were 289 Baptists in Newgate Prison and 18 in the Tower. Most of the convictions were for preaching and frequenting conventicles. Persecution was aggravated by the encouragement given to informers. One third of the fines for attending conventicles went to the King, and the remainder was divided between Parish and informer. As the preacher was fined £40, the owner of the meeting-place £20, and each hearer 10/-, there was a strong incentive to spying.

Kent and Sussex did not escape their share of persecution. Much could be written about their sufferings. Many Pastors were imprisoned, some repeatedly because they repeated the offence of preaching immediately they were released and others

for long sentences. Joseph Wright, the Maidstone elder, was in prison for twenty years. Wives and children were left to the charity of friends. Men were repeatedly fined, some until they were ruined. If they had no money their goods were distrained and usually far more was taken than was needed to meet the fine. A farmer could, and did, lose the whole of his cattle for allowing a service in his barn. In some places mobs were encouraged to attack and pillage the houses of prominent dissenters. Some of the church members made an agreement to share according to their ability any penalties any of their fellow members might incur.

The Dutch war which began in 1665 brought a measure of relief, for the widespread bitterness and resentment caused by the enforcement of the Conventicle Act impaired the nation's unity. Many prisoners were released, including John Bunyan after twelve years in gaol. In 1672 Charles published a Declaration of Indulgence which withdrew the penal laws against nonconformists and gave them the right to worship in approved places and under approved preachers. Twenty licences were received by Baptists in Kent, outnumbering those granted to all other dissenting bodies. Chichester, Hastings and Mountfield, near Battle, were among the Sussex churches granted licences.[3] Although Parliament when reassembled compelled the King to withdraw the Declaration of Indulgence, the persecution was never as severe as formerly, and Associations in some areas began to meet again.

Persecution was renewed in the later years of the reign of Charles II and at the beginning of James II's brief rule, deepening into terror, chiefly in the West country, after the failure of Monmouth's bid for the throne. But in 1688 William of Orange landed at Tor Bay and James fled the country. This bloodless revolution brought important changes to nonconformity. It marked the end of organised persecution and the beginning of toleration.

CHAPTER III

BAPTISTS UNDER TOLERATION

THERE are numerous details of the hardships and the courage of the Baptists in Kent and Sussex during the years of persecution, but records of the regular life and activities of the churches are more scanty. Useful information is found in the reports which the Bishops demanded from their clergy concerning the dissenters in their parishes. They reveal that in scores of villages there were Baptist causes that remained faithful, and new groups appear. Some of the larger churches had increased in strength. In 1667 the Dover church, in spite of frequent harrying, had 242 members drawn from a wide area, and a little later, in a lull of the persecution, they had grown strong enough to divide into three separate churches —Dover, Folkestone-Hythe, and Sandwich-Deal.[4] The Ashford church in 1680 had four elders and 50 members. When persecution ceased nine years later the membership was 160. The two pastors of Biddenden were imprisoned in 1660, but the church had so increased by 1678 that it became necessary to form two churches, one at Biddenden under George Hammon and the other at Tenterden under James Blackmore. Vigorous evangelism was carried on in the Horsham district and in the country districts of East Sussex.

Of some churches there is a different story to tell. Not all Baptists were heroes and not all churches were strengthened by their trials. Yet on the whole the Kent and Sussex churches maintained their life and witness through the shadowed years. And now they were called to face years of comparative tranquillity. They had endured persecution with courage and faithfulness. How will they fare under toleration?

It soon became apparent that all was not well. The initiative and vigorous evangelism of the years of freedom and the steadfast witness through the long period of oppression were little in evidence. Many of the churches were depressed and

apathetic. Doubtless this was partly due to the reaction which often follows a time of strain, but there were other factors to dishearten believing men at this time. In the past thirty years the religious climate of England had been slowly changing. The moral atmosphere had changed, for the reaction to Puritanism had been violent and the cynical morality of the Stuart Court and Parliament had lowered the general standard of conduct. Men's minds were no longer as pre-occupied with religion as in the years before the Restoration. There were many other matters to hold their interest. Stirring events were happening at home and abroad. The political strife between Whig and Tory was intense, and for nearly the whole of William's reign England was at war with France. Marlborough was winning notable victories on land and the English fleet was slowly wearing down the stronger navy of the French.

There were interests of other kinds which claimed attention. It was an age of growing interest in learning and of quickened appreciation of the arts. Men were reading the sceptical philosophy of Locke and Hume, and following eagerly the exciting experiments of the scientists. It was an age when men were coming to rely on reason and to believe that the power of the mind to understand and explain was the sole arbiter of truth. The sceptical climate which this engendered permeated the Episcopal church and did not leave the other communions unaffected.

Not many Baptists were at home in such a world. Few of their ministers, apart from the score or so of Anglican clergymen who became Baptist elders, were educated and cultured men. For the most part they were self-taught, earning their living, receiving little or no payment from their churches and doing their ministerial work when the long day's tasks were over. They had little time for study, and often little inclination. Learning in ministers was widely distrusted. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the question of the education of the ministry was raised in the General Baptist Assembly. The General Baptist Society for the education of young men for the ministry was then formed and in 1798 it was reported that the third student had been accepted.

The Particular Baptists were more alive to the need, but did little about it. Their Assembly in 1689 decided to establish a Fund to assist ministers "that are disposed to study and have

an inviting gift" in attaining knowledge and understanding of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But at their Assembly at Bristol four years later the old prejudice against an educated ministry is seen in the statement that the knowledge of tongues was not essential to constitute a minister of the Gospel, yet "they dare not limit the Holy One, Who bestows gifts for edification upon the learned, as well as upon the unlearned". This neglect of education in their ministry weakened the appeal of Baptists to their contemporaries, not least to the younger men and women.

Another source of weakness was the lack of gifted and farsighted leaders in these earlier years of the eighteenth century, men who knew what the times needed and could kindle the enthusiasm of the churches and harness their powers for effective service. That younger men were not coming forward to succeed the stalwart leaders during persecution was partly due to the limitations imposed on dissenters. Among other handicaps the Test and Corporation Act remained in force. This meant that unless a man was prepared to take Communion at the Parish church he was excluded from civic and national service and from the learned professions, because the Universities were barred to him. The sons of Baptist parents who lacked the deep convictions of their fathers were not always willing to accept these disabilities.

But the picture presented by our Baptist churches in this period was not one of unrelieved gloom. In some areas much good work was achieved. The old evangelical fervour burned in the North, and in Kent and Sussex there were many evidences of vigorous life. A considerable attempt was made to meet the need for places of worship. Very few churches possessed their own meeting-houses before this century and the lack of them was often a sore hindrance to the work. When members or sympathisers who opened their premises for worship died or moved away, or when the lease of rented premises could not be renewed, the church might not be able to find alternative accommodation and was liable to disperse and die out. At least ten churches in Kent and Sussex built chapels before 1750. The registration of places of worship which was compulsory under the Toleration Act revealed the existence of 45 Baptist places of worship in Sussex, most of them in rooms or in premises lent or hired.[5] Nearly all of

them were General Baptist churches and they were well distributed over the county.

A number of new causes were started. The church which worshipped in Farley Street Chapel, Ramsgate, built in 1724, was formed a year or two earlier. A minute book opening in 1725 describes it as the Isle of Thanet General Baptist church. Work was begun in Birchington in 1740 and a church formed at Ditchling in 1689. Baptists from a wide area had worshipped there for many years. In 1741 members of the Ditchling church who lived in Lewes began to worship in a house in Eastport Lane, Southover, and built a chapel in 1758. This is yet another instance of a church worshipping at more than one centre. In Cranbrook the vicar of the parish church, the Rev. John Johnstone, was so concerned at the number of his parishioners who were worshipping at the General Baptist chapel that in 1710 he built over the church porch a dipping pool for total immersion that so he might meet the objection of the Baptists. This baptistry can be seen today.

Municipal records in Folkestone name three places appointed for worship. In 1698 Thomas Carr's dwelling house, situated in Folkestone Town, was "a meeting place appointed for religious worship by the dissenting protestants called Baptists". Thomas Carr, a miller, was a minister among the Baptists. In 1701 "that eastern part of the house near the Bail Sole (now called The Bayle) in this town, wherein Capt. Jordan lately lived, is a meeting place appointed for religious worship by the said dissenting protestants called Ana-baptists." In 1720 the same William Kennett who gave the 1701 notice of registration gave notice "that the room over the hemp-dresser's workshop in this locality was appointed a meeting place".

This building of places of worship, the growth of established causes and the birth of new groups of Baptists, bear witness that whatever was happening in some other parts of the country the General Baptists in Kent and Sussex had not entirely lost their evangelical fervour.

Their concern was not limited only to this country. In 1714 they sent two of their messengers, Robert Norden of Walberton (near Arundel), and Thomas White of Sevenoaks to minister to the settlers in Virginia. They went out with the backing of the General Assembly, for in the 1714 Assembly the delegates are urged to stir up their churches for some

assistance for these two missionaries "who are appointed and approved by this Assembly to go to Virginia to preach the Gospel". One of the men died on the way out and in 1716 three more were sent, William Wood of Lewes, Thomas Burge of Tunbridge Wells and Thomas Harrison. Enthusiasm was high in the 1717 Association meetings and £65 was raised for their messengers' support. In the following year £200 was given. Their work endured. Churches were formed and evangelised in their turn, establishing other churches further south. In time they became more Calvinistic and joined up with the Baptist churches around Philadelphia. We echo the words of the writer of an article on these missionaries in the Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, "The great Southern Baptist Convention owes something, perhaps much, to the humble Kentish Association of 1708".[6] It was in that year that the idea was first mooted in the Association.

The last paragraph has made it plain that the Kent Association had been re-formed, but before we pass to that it is necessary to refer at some length to a major cause of weakness in the General Baptist churches of Kent and Sussex. This was the steady growth of Unitarian beliefs in their churches.

Modern Unitarianism dates from the Reformation. It held that reason and conscience were the arbiters of belief and practice. It was critical of the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement and Eternal Punishment. Its teaching was influential in some branches of the Anabaptist movement on the continent, and it is probably through them that it reached this country. For many decades it deeply influenced the churches of England. Its teaching appealed to many in the "age of reason". Many Anglicans were influenced, but its effect was greatest on the English Presbyterians. By the end of the nineteenth century most of the churches in England that were called Presbyterian were in fact Unitarian, with the exception of those which resulted from the new stream of Presbyterianism which was coming in from Scotland. In 1864 J. H. Newman could write in his Apologia, "Had I been born an English Presbyterian, perhaps I should never have known our Lord's divinity". Charles Lloyd, the author of *The Life of a Dissenting Minister*, 1766-1829, writing of his training for the ministry in a Presbyterian Academy, refers to "the bad faith of the Governors in appointing Calvinistic and Trinitarian

teachers in a seminary of the Presbyterian denomination", and later, about 1812, he writes of "the Presbyterian sect, more recently called Unitarian". Unitarianism had little influence on the Particular Baptist churches but it wrought havoc among the General Baptists of Kent and Sussex.

This was mainly due to Matthew Caffyn (1628-1714), a Sussex man, an elder of the Horsham church and later ordained a messenger. He was a vigorous and forceful character, always ready to defend the faith that was in him. When George Fox was in Sussex he had two long disputes with him, one of them lasting three days. In his *The Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (1659) Fox gives details of his disputes with Caffyn and other Baptist leaders. Caffyn was tireless in itinerant evangelism, establishing a number of small causes, and his reputation stood high in both counties. He became a prominent figure at the Annual Assemblies in London. He was about forty years of age when his views about the Person of Christ began to change. Under Mennonite influence he ceased to believe in the humanity of our Lord, but later moved to the other extreme and denied His divinity. Joseph Wright of Maidstone preferred a charge of heresy against him in the Assembly. Caffyn was acquitted and Wright was censured for lack of charity, but the Assembly agreed that the beliefs attributed to Caffyn were heretical. The issues were discussed in Assembly after Assembly, but the Assembly always refused to condemn Caffyn or to deny him a place among them.

The effect on the member churches was disastrous. Their energies were diverted from their true tasks by prolonged and fruitless discussions. Many churches ceased to send representatives, having grown weary of the recurring bickerings. Others withdrew because they were out of sympathy with the increasing laxity of the official views. Some moved into the Particular Baptist fold. In 1728 a group in the Folkestone-Hythe General Baptist church, dissatisfied with its teaching, left and formed a Particular Baptist group which joined the Particular Baptist church in Canterbury. In 1746 Michael Bligh, a preacher in the Bessel's Green General Baptist church "was silenced from preaching among that people" because of a conflict about doctrine. He eventually left with a number of sympathisers and founded a Particular Baptist church in Sevenoaks. A similar situation arose in Ditchling. Henry Booker, a preacher

in the church, was deeply influenced through George Whitefield's visit to Brighton in 1758. As a result his preaching displeased the Ditchling congregation, who were moving rapidly to open Unitarianism, and they ejected him. He, too, started a Particular Baptist church in his home village of Wivelsfield. A chapel was built which is still in regular use for Strict Baptist worship. But the most serious result was the conversion of many members of Baptist churches to a form of Unitarianism. In communities largely illiterate and untrained to think for themselves a man as trusted and honoured as Caffyn wielded a potent influence, especially when he was defended and supported by the Assembly.

The result in Kent and Sussex was to divide the churches, introducing bitterness and uncertainty and undermining evangelistic effort. As early as 1677 there was trouble in the Smarden-Staplehurst church. This church, which had grown steadily since 1640, was split over the doctrine of the Trinity and considerable secessions followed. The Ditchling church consistently supported Caffyn in his disputes at the Assembly gatherings and voted against his exclusion. Originally its membership was by baptism and the laying on of hands, but the chapel Trust Deed drawn up in 1740 contained no reference to baptism, and by 1790 the ministers were avowed Unitarians. In 1721 the General Assembly met in Chichester. There is no record of any previous Assembly being held out of London, but the London General Baptist churches were declining and were divided by the Caffyn disputes and the Kent and Sussex churches formed a considerable proportion of the Assembly's membership. This may have been the reason why the Assembly met in Chichester, and in Horsham two years later. There was already a strong group of Caffyn's adherents in the Chichester church. One of its early elders, George Smith, was "confined for a long time in Horsham jail, to the great distress of an affectionate wife and three small children". Caffyn was a fellow prisoner for a period and influenced Smith. But when Smith was released and began to preach the new doctrines he was opposed by the church. But the teaching found root in some minds for in the year the Assembly met in Chichester the followers of the new teaching seceded to form a separate group.

What we see happening in these churches was to be paralleled in a number of other churches as the century moved on its way.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVIVAL OF ASSOCIATION LIFE

IN the early years of the eighteenth century three Associations were formed. The earliest, in 1700, was formed by a group of churches who left the General Assembly because of its doctrinal laxity and joined the Particular Baptists. Shortly after this the original 1657 General Baptist Association was re-formed. Then in 1717 some of its members separated to form an East Kent Association.

The records of the meetings of these early Associations are not complete. There were no permanent officers, a different scribe being appointed each year, and there were not always permanent record books. Minutes have been lost and minutes may not always have been written. In addition, nearly all the records of these Association meetings are brief and their contents meagre.

1. *The* 1700 *Association of Particular Baptist churches in Kent.*

The formation of this Association was the direct result of the dissensions provoked in the Kent churches and in the General Assembly by Caffyn's theology. At the 1700 General Assembly the representatives of the Ashford church took a strong Trinitarian stand. At these meetings they heard of General Baptists who had moved into the Particular Baptist fold. They eventually reached a similar decision and were able to carry with them the majority of their members. There were other General Baptist churches who were moving in the same direction and these formed a Particular Baptist Association in 1700, for the record which has been preserved of their Association meeting at Rolvenden in 1703 describes it as the fourth meeting. There were four other churches represented, Biddenden, Smarden, Ashford and Canterbury. Rolvenden was then the centre of a widely scattered church which afterwards found its centre in Sandhurst. The Biddenden church was a minority who had

withdrawn from the flourishing General Baptist church in the village. The Canterbury church was the long established Particular Baptist church in Northgate. In Smarden the leader of the General Baptist church, Thomas Gilham, and a number of the members had embraced Particular Baptist beliefs and eventually in 1705 the church divided. Hawkhurst was received into the Association in 1703 and Maidstone in 1707. This Maidstone church was not the General Baptist church which was led for so many years by the veteran elder and messenger Joseph Wright. Dr. Whitley states that there were two Baptist churches in Maidstone at this time and suggests that this was the church under John Smith.

In 1706 the Association met at Ashford. The proceedings were recorded in the minute book of the Ashford church and include answers given by the Association to the questions of the member churches who were seeking advice. The question asked by the Ashford church illustrates the deep division brought into some of the churches by the controversies of the time. They asked, "What further ought to be done with Norton Jarman and that party with him that be offended because our ministers preached up the doctrine of the Holy-Trinity, upon which they rout off and ar gon to the Church at Canterbury under the care of Luke Savory, Samuel Ongley and Searles Jarman?" The Association's counsel was "That there having been a first and second admonition and they still continuing in their dissent; that it be noted in the church book that Norton Jarman being gone disorderly to the church at Canterbury, that he and those with him be no longer looked upon as members of this church at Ashford. Romans xvi: 17; Titus iii: 10". The Smarden church asked a similar question concerning, "Those that have made a dissention from us", and are told that the separation has no Scriptural warrant, and Bro. Gilham and his friends have nothing they can do, save to admonish them, "forasmuch that needeth not to be cut off that hath rent it selfe off". The following year the Association met at Smarden in the house of Thomas Gilham, the elder of the church. No meeting-house had yet been built.

This Association did not last very long. The Association book of the General Baptists in 1719 records that in 1708 the Calvinists "Bore a brief testimony and dissolved again". By the middle of the century the Association had lapsed.

2. *The* 1708 *Kent Association of General Baptist churches.*

We owe our knowledge of the early years of this revived Kent Association to Samuel Richardson. He had been a member of the Horsley Down church, London. There he was ordained as messenger and after evangelistic work in Huntingdonshire and Ireland he was appointed to the oversight of the General Baptist churches in the South East. It is probably due to his leadership that the Kent Association survived in a period when a number of General Baptist Associations waned and died. He gathered together the records from 1708 of the Association meetings of the Kent group of churches. This record was then used as the Association minute book.

The Association meetings in 1708 were held at Headcorn. This was not the first meeting of the Association. The minutes of the 1704 General Assembly record a proposal from the Kent Association that a Fund be established to aid ministers. Also at this 1708 meeting the Association was drawing up an answer to a letter which had been received from the General Assembly enquiring why they had sent no representatives to the Assembly meetings. The reply was a long one, its main purport being that they ceased to attend the Assembly because the Assembly had planned a union with a body (unnamed) which the Kent Association thought would destroy the common basis of General Baptist belief found in Hebrews vi: 1, 2. Here is another echo of the disquiet caused by the Caffyn controversies. But though the Association had been revived before 1708 the date of its first meeting is unknown. It may well have been started some years before 1704.

Twenty-five delegates from Cranbrook, Biddenden, Folkestone-Hythe, Maidstone, Bessels Green, Canterbury, Eythorne, Marden and Tunbridge Wells, were present at the 1708 meetings. At the meetings the following year the Association decided to send representatives to the Assembly in order that their views might be heard. In 1710 the Sussex churches of Horsham, Ditchling and Walberton (near Arundel) were present and Dover joined the ranks in the next year. Up to 1729, when this first group of records comes to an end, other churches present were Deal, Borden, Rolvenden, with Turner's Hill and Chichester from Sussex. Considerable time was given to discussing the work of their messengers in Virginia referred to in the previous chapter, but the spirit which inspired this

courageous and heartening enterprise is sadly lacking when the Association turns to home affairs. The note which most often recurs is a plaint over the low state of the churches and the dearth of leaders. Some churches were without elders; others lacked deacons. More messengers were needed, but it was increasingly difficult to find men who were prepared to accept office.

In the first twenty-one years Canterbury had dropped out of the Association, and the minutes record that the church at Biddenden, which had flourished so greatly in the days of persecution, had dissolved and the remnant had united with Headcorn. There were 17 member churches, 11 from Kent, 5 from Sussex and 1 from Surrey. The records, which had been very brief and given little detailed information, then come to an end for 11 years. They are resumed in 1741 and continued until 1760. Most of the original members are in membership, but attendance is very erratic. In 1741 only eight churches were represented and the rest had sent no reports on the state of their churches nor an apology. New names appear. One of them is the Isle of Thanet church. Its members were scattered in a number of places, but the centre was Ramsgate. This is the church which worshipped in Farley Street Chapel, a building which was still standing in 1930. In 1732 it had 32 members. Chatham was present in 1760, a year in which only 13 member churches attended. The minutes of the previous twenty years are somewhat depressing to read. The familiar plaint of the spiritual state of the churches and the dearth of leaders grows more frequent and the impression is given of a community that has grown discouraged and lost vigour and vision.

3. *The* 1717 *East Kent Association of General Baptist churches.*

This Association was composed of a group of churches who had ceased to attend the General Assembly after the Caffyn split. Its loyalty to the foundation beliefs of the General Baptist churches and to the churches' duty to evangelise is made plain in the record of its first meeting. "Meeting of the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ in and about East Kent (professing the principles of the doctrines of Christ mentioned in Hebrews vi: 1, 2, and the doctrine of general redemption) agreed and appointed by order of the said churches, holden

at the house of our brother William Tucker the 16th May, 1717, by the Messengers, Elders and Representatives of the churches, viz. Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone-Hythe, Eythorne, Deal, Barden, to consider how to manage the great affair of the Gospel and to assist one another therein after having sought the Lord in prayer".

It was arranged to meet twice a year on dates which did not clash with the meetings of the 1708 Association, to hold an interchange of ministers at least once a year, and to send to the member churches a copy of any agreements reached at their meetings. It was also agreed to send representatives to the Kentish Association meeting at Sevenoaks in June, so evidently the re-grouping of the churches did not destroy friendly relations. Distances and the difficulties of travel may well have influenced their decision to divide into an East and West section, for both sections were at this time holding to the original beliefs of the General Baptists and were critical of the attitude of the Assembly.

Up to 1727 the records are continuous, though scanty. Here, too, there is despondency at the low state of the churches. They advise the holding of quarterly meetings to examine their spiritual state. The lack of ministers was a perpetual concern and there were several plans drawn up to supply the vacant pulpits. In 1719 Canterbury, Deal, Folkestone-Hythe and Eythorne agreed to supply ministerial service to the Isle of Thanet church for a certain number of Sundays in the quarter, and a similar arrangement was made on behalf of other churches, though it was not always possible to fulfil their brotherly intentions. In 1727 the Association meetings were almost entirely concerned with this matter of providing ministers.

Minutes are preserved of the Association meetings in 1729 and 1734, but apart from 1760 there is silence till 1768. The records, if kept, were recorded in another book, and this has not been found.

The Barden church dropped out very early, and is not mentioned after 1718. The Eythorne church divided into the four distinct churches of Eythorne, Wingham, Stelling and the Isle of Thanet. Thus in the first eighteen years the membership of the Association was virtually unchanged. There was no decrease but there was no growth. This static condition, with

its lack of evangelism, was unfortunately representative of most of the Baptist Churches in this period. In 1760 the combined membership of these two General Baptist Associations was thirty churches, and more than a quarter of these did not attend Association gatherings. Neither Association had been able to win the wholehearted support of its members.

On the whole, to read the records of the three Associations is a depressing experience. Apart from the work among the Virginian colonists they give little indication of the vigorous ministry which was certainly being carried on in some parts of Kent and Sussex. There is much lamentation and introspection, with frequent calls to prayer and fasting, but no signs of any positive measures to awaken new life or to meet the need for leaders. Much of the Association transactions has undoubtedly not been recorded. Judging by the writing and spelling, most of the scribes were more accustomed to guiding a plough than a pen and found writing a laborious art. This may account for the almost entire absence of any reference to the questions brought by the churches, to resolutions discussed or to the reports on the state of the churches. As the records stand there seems little in the meetings to attract and inspire and one can feel a measure of sympathy with the churches who faltered in their allegiance. When the Association was re-constituted in 1768 it becomes plain that they had learned much from partial failure.

Before we go on to consider the future actions of the Associations it will be well to examine the nature of the churches which constituted them.

Their organisation, mode of worship and religious usages, would have a large measure of uniformity. They were based on the Confessions of Faith which the General Baptists had put forth from time to time, partly to guide the faithful and partly to make their beliefs clear in the face of misrepresentation. Each church would have an elder, whose task it was to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. In the early eighteenth century he would normally be one of the members of the church who revealed gifts of character and speech which fitted him for the leadership. He would be nominated by the church, but before he could assume office he would be examined before the church by neighbouring elders or messengers. If he received their approval he was then solemnly ordained by

prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands. Hands were laid on him by all the elders or messengers present or by one of them as representative of them all. The church and those concerned fasted from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The ordained elder continued to carry on his normal occupation. He was closely bound to his own church and could not move to another without their consent. Sometimes there would be more than one elder, in addition to several members appointed to preach. There were two main reasons for this. An elder, having to earn a living, was sometimes compelled to be away from his church for a period and another was needed to fulfil the function of eldership. But the chief reason was that often church members were scattered over a wide area. The church in the small Sussex village of Ditchling was composed of those who lived in Ditchling and in nearby villages who were able to worship at Ditchling, but also of groups much further away, including Billingshurst, Lindfield, Battle, East Grinstead and Lewes, who found it more practicable to worship at a local centre. Thus Lewes had its own building and worshipped separately from Ditchling for many years before it became independent. In these conditions more than one elder was needed to serve the church adequately. The elders were sometimes called pastors. The name 'minister' was still reserved for the local preachers, and it was not until the end of the century that it was used as an alternative to elder or pastor. The second office was that of deacon, whose function was to look after the material needs of the church, to wash the feet of the saints and above all to care for the poor and the sick. In the earlier years deacons were often appointed with prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands, but this solemn initiation became modified as the eighteenth century proceeded.

Worship was very simple. The morning service began at hours varying from 8.0 to 10.0 according to the season of the year, and the afternoon at 2.0 or 2.30. Difficulties of lighting and travel ruled out evening services. Usually worship included the reading of the Scriptures, though this was frowned upon in some churches. There was no collection, except at the Communion Service. (In the minutes of the Horsham church a list of these offerings is headed "Contry Bushions".) Members were expected to give according to their means and responsibilities. The deacons in these small communities, where every-

one knew each other's business, used to make an assessment of the amount a member ought to give, and they were not at all reluctant to rebuke a member whom they thought was not giving his fair share.

The services consisted of prayers, reading of Scripture and sermon and usually lasted one and a half hours. It is unlikely that there was singing in a General Baptist church as early as this, for from the first there was widespread opposition to congregational singing. The question of singing Psalms was brought before the General Assembly in 1689 and the decision was that it "appears so strangely foreign to evangelical worship that it was not conceived any ways safe for the churches to admit to such carnal formalities". Their argument was that they found no Scriptural warrant for a whole congregation, converted and unconverted, joining in singing "the precomposed poems of men, or even the Psalms of David translated into English metre". An individual, when addressing a congregation, was free to sing, using the Psalms or Scripture language as far as possible, but to call upon a congregation to sing was to invite the unbelievers present to express beliefs they did not hold and to claim experiences they did not share. For a similar reason the Bessels Green church was advised by the General Assembly in 1724 not to use the Lord's Prayer in public worship. The question caused much heated dispute, but opinion slowly changed. The matter was raised again in the 1731 Assembly and their views were much less emphatic than forty years before. Their position now was that only a few churches practise or approve hymn singing, but as some churches believe that the Scriptures enjoin them to praise God in this way "we do not condemn them".

The Communion Service was usually held once a month. There was a difference of opinion among Baptist churches as to the proper person to administer the sacrament. Some held that he must be an ordained man, while others were not insistent on this. But all agreed that even if the administrant were not ordained he must be duly appointed by the church. The communicants sat to receive the elements, following the example of our Lord.

Church meetings were held when occasion demanded, which might not be more than once a year. The Church Book of the Black Friars General Baptist church in Canterbury, containing

the minutes of their church meetings from 1711-1721, has been preserved and makes interesting reading. These minutes were signed by men only. Not all churches allowed their women members to attend church meetings. The Horsham church did not allow their presence till 1834. This Black Friars church must be the only Baptist church whose place of worship was the refectory of a Dominican monastery. It was built in Canterbury in the thirteenth century. Henry VIII suppressed it and gave it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who sold it. Eventually it came into the hands of a Huguenot surgeon and he let the Refectory to the General Baptists for worship. In 1732 they were able to buy it and a small garth for a burial ground. Some items of their meetings would be familiar to us, such as choosing delegates for the Association and Assembly meetings, the decision to pay the delegates' expenses, reading the latest news of their missionaries in Virginia, and the decision to hold an exchange of ministers. There was the reception and dismissal of members. Letters of dismissal from other churches were carefully scanned, and frequently it was decided to send a representative to the dismissing church, if not too distant, to make sure of the spiritual fitness of the applicant. But other matters would be strange to us. A date is fixed for the washing of feet. This was not a regular practice of church life, but was held when members requested it. There is no evidence that it was much used after the Restoration except in Kent, where it was still being practised at the end of the century. A member whose preaching gifts had been tested by the church is 'Approbated' and it is agreed that he now exercise his gifts in public. A man and wife are granted 1/- a week towards their maintenance "until their crops come on", and one of the preachers is paid 6d. for the hire of the horse that took him to his appointment.

But it is discipline that occupies most space in the minutes. The period devoted to this is called in these minutes "the Discipline". The church kept careful watch over the behaviour of its members "lest any walk disorderly", and the actions which came under that heading were legion. The Black Friars church rebuke one sister "for marrying out of communion", a frequent charge; another for "singing vain songs"; yet another for allowing her children "to dance and play" and "to learn all sorts of Musick". Repeated visits are paid to a

member who persisted in bellringing. "Neglecting to make good his place here", i.e., non-attendance at worship, is frequently dealt with. The church is very patient with its offenders, visiting them repeatedly, and is eager to welcome back the penitent. To make known to the world what happened in "The Discipline" was to be reproved as disorderly and treated rigorously. All churches spent much time on discipline. Lying, slander, extravagance in dress, taking part in amusements, and not paying debts were all liable to rebuke. Servants were reproved for negligence or disobedience, and masters for harsh or unfair treatment. Fornication led to exclusion from the church fellowship until sincere repentance. Drunkenness was treated severely. Beer was then considered a necessity but members were counselled to abstain after the third glass. Domestic life comes under the church's scrutiny. Husbands are admonished for neglecting their duty to their wives. In Warboys a member was brought before the church for "not loving his wife as he ought, and for speaking hateful and displeasing words against her". Thomas Bedford, of the Fenstanton church, was accused of beating his wife in the open street, but maintained that it was lawful for a man to beat his wife. The old English law did in fact grant this privilege, but the correction must "be moderate and within reasonable bounds". The danger that the duty of discipline might give rise to trivial or malicious tale-bearing was guarded against in some churches by insisting that the charge must be put into writing and signed and a signed copy be given to the accused before it was handed to the deacons.

Few demands were made on the time of church members except for worship on Sundays, church meetings and periods of prayer on special occasions. Weeknight and sectional activities did not exist. Sunday Schools were not thought of. To worship God regularly and to keep oneself unspotted from the world were the all important duties of the church member.

CHAPTER V

REVIVAL AND THE KENT ASSOCIATION OF GENERAL BAPTISTS 1768 TO 1799

BOTH the Kent and Sussex and the East Kent Associations were struggling to exist in the middle years of the century. Attendance was desultory and despondency reigned. There is no record of regular meetings of the 1717 Association after 1734 nor of the 1708 Association after 1760. But in 1768 Association life made a fresh start. The records of the first meeting are preserved in the minute book of the Headcorn church, with a note to the effect that "This Association was renewed in 1768 and became regularly held". Stress was laid on the need "to review the Association and to meet points of weakness and irregularity in the past". This meeting in 1768 is headed "Proceedings of the Messengers, Elders and Representatives of the General Baptist churches in Kent". It should be noticed that the Sussex churches are no longer included, though relations continued to be friendly and the Association consulted with them over the appointment of messengers. The renewed Association consisted of eighteen churches, viz.

Canterbury	Dover	Folkestone-Hythe	Tunbridge Wells
Wingham	Stelling	Chatham	Marden
Smarden	Headcorn	Maidstone	Deptford
Sevenoaks	Rolvenden	Isle of Thanet	Deal
Cranbrook	Eythorne		

Chatham had taken little part in Association life till now. The Association met there in 1657 and an attendance is registered in 1760. Apart from this she stood aloof. Deptford is a new church. The London Baptist Association had not yet swallowed up the churches in the north-west corner of Kent. Apart from the Sussex churches this 1768 Association includes almost all the members of the 1708 and 1717 Associations.

It gathered in one body most of the General Baptist churches in Kent.

It re-formed at an auspicious time, for there were signs that the churches were moving out of the depression and apathy of the first half of the century. This was mainly due to the Methodist revival. The eighteenth century produced the Rationalist and the Deist, but it also produced John Wesley, whose long life (1703-1791) covered almost the whole of the century. At Oxford he gathered around him a group of earnest, devout and scholarly Christians, including his brother Charles and George Whitefield. His experience of conversion in 1738 led him to devote the rest of his life to evangelism, and by 1760 his work covered the whole of the British Isles and had begun to spread to America. He was less of a Calvinist than most of his followers, which caused his break with Whitefield in 1741.

The churches were slow in following his lead. The strong Calvinist element in the Established church was hostile to his Arminianism, as is illustrated in the trenchant, not to say virulent, correspondence between Wesley and the author of *Rock of Ages*. His zeal offended in an age when religious enthusiasm was considered in bad taste. So their pulpits were closed against him and he was driven to follow Whitefield's example and preach in the open air. The Baptists were equally slow to respond. The Particular Baptists shared the Anglicans' hostility to Arminianism. To both Particular and General Baptists his infant baptism was a stumbling block. But it was only a matter of time before the earlier zeal for evangelism was awakened. There were many whose hearts were stirred by this work of God, and not a few left the Baptist fold that they might share in it. In the register of members of the Horsham church in the years around 1750 the words "gone to join the Methodies" are written against several names.

There were other influences at work. The writings of Jonathan Edwards and the news of the 'Great Awakening' in New England, which was largely the fruit of his labours, brought the thought of revival before English Baptists. New life was stirring in Wales and here and there in England and in Scotland individual men were experiencing revival in their churches and districts. It was no wonder that new life began to stir in both streams of Baptist life with effects which were to

influence the Baptist communities in every part of the land, the Kent and Sussex churches among them.

In the case of the General Baptists the quickening movement was led by Dan Taylor (1738-1816), a young Yorkshire miner. This thoughtful and studious youth of nineteen was converted through the ministry of the Methodists, but later he and some of his friends were baptised, and worshipped together in the village of Wadsworth, not far from Halifax. Here the first General Baptist church in Yorkshire was formed and Dan Taylor was ordained as its pastor. He was made welcome by the Lincolnshire Association, but his experience of their churches caused him increasing concern. Their doctrinal laxity, their clinging to old customs, and their frequent disputes chilled this eager young evangelist. He found more vigorous life in the Leicestershire Baptists, and conceived the idea of uniting the Leicestershire churches in a new connection of such churches as remained orthodox. It was decided to hold a meeting in London while the General Baptist Assembly was in session. At this meeting in 1770 the "New Connexion of General Baptist Churches" was formed, or, as it was called in the printed minutes, "An Assembly of Free-Grace General Baptists with a design to revive experimental religion or primitive Christianity in faith and practice".

Three Kent churches joined. These were the newly-formed Bessels Green church, led by John Stanger, with 45 members, the Eythorne church under John Knott, with 32 members, and the Deal church under James Fenn, with 21 members. These three pastors were among the nineteen people who signed the declaration of principle of the New Connexion. In 1771 the New Connexion decided to divide into two Associations, one in the North and the other in the South, covering London, Kent and Surrey. The first meeting of the Southern Association was held at Bessels Green, but the New Connexion made little progress in London and the South. The churches of Kent and Sussex, apart from the three mentioned above, remained faithful to the old Assembly and the Southern Association of the new movement made little impact and slowly faded out.

The Northern Association gradually established itself and was especially strong in the Midlands. Various attempts were made to unite the old Assembly and the new Connexion, but

without success. There were many differences between them. The Assembly frowned upon congregational singing, held it essential that the newly baptised should have hands laid upon them, and were convinced that the order of messengers had divine authority. Dan Taylor encouraged singing, had no strong feelings about the laying on of hands at baptism, and dispensed with messengers. But more serious was the Assembly's movement from the orthodox General Baptist doctrines. Here was the obstacle which made re-union impossible. Dan Taylor continued to attend the General Assembly for several years and only ceased to do so when the Assembly received into membership a pastor and a church who were avowedly Unitarian.

The vigour of this new movement revealed itself in several ways. One of these was its active concern to provide training for candidates for the ministry. In 1796 a Fund was opened for this purpose and met with such a good response that in 1798 it became possible to open an Academy at Mile End under the superintendence of Dan Taylor, who had moved to London a few years earlier. The urgent need of a disciplined training is emphasised in some of the writings of the period. Charles Lloyd (1766-1829), in *Particulars of the Life of a Dissenting Minister*, gives a disquieting picture of the ignorance, coarseness and conceit of many of his fellow students and of the poor quality of the instruction they received. Dr. Whitley, writing of the Baptist Academical Institution at Stepney (now Regent's Park College, Oxford), which was founded in 1810, uses these words, "Its work began to change the character of the London ministers. It must be owned that they had, on the whole, been a drag on the denomination; many were illiterate, many had to be expelled for immorality, most were terribly conservative".[7] The leaders of the New Connexion were alive to the need for more careful training and took useful action.

Among the Particular Baptists the revival of effective life was due not to one man but to a group of men with outstanding gifts of vision, learning and leadership, who slowly delivered their brethren from the shackles of a hyper-Calvinism which was throttling evangelical effort. The first stirrings of a new outlook were seen in the circular letter sent out in 1770 to its ministers by the Northamptonshire Association, which covered several counties. It included the significant words: "every soul

that comes to Jesus Christ to be saved from hell and sin by Him, is to be encouraged. The coming soul need not fear that he is not elected, for none but such would be willing to come to submit to Christ". Robert Hall, Senior (1728-1791), minister of Arnesby, near Leicester, from 1753 until his death in 1791, expanded the same theme in his Association address at College Lane, Northampton, in 1779. His central thesis was that "the way to Jesus is graciously laid open to everyone who chooses to come to Him". The book in which he enlarged this sermon exerted a wide influence. Ivimey writes that the year 1779 was the commencement of a new era in our denomination.[8]

Such views met with prolonged and active opposition. That they eventually won their way and ended the reign of a type of Calvinism which held it useless to invite the unconverted to put their trust in Christ was largely due to Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). After long thought and much heart searching he reached the conviction which he proclaimed when he was inducted to the Kettering church in 1783, "I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the Gospel to all that will hear it". Like Robert Hall he expanded his convictions in his book *The Gospel worthy of all acceptation.* This brought him into prolonged conflict with his conservative brethren, but his views were gradually accepted by the great majority of Particular Baptists.

Thus in both streams of Baptist life there was an awakening to the primary duty of the church to preach the Gospel. The minds of Christian men were turning from arid formulas and barren disputations to the spiritual and physical needs of their fellows. Horizons were widening, and it was not long before they were to extend to the far ends of the earth.

One result of this awakening was the resurgence of Association life in many parts of the country, including Kent. The General Baptist churches here were not in a healthy condition. The stimulating influence of the New Connexion scarcely touched them. The controversy over the Person of Christ continued to weaken and divide them, and there was no help in a General Assembly which maintained the orthodox creed in theory but in practice received into membership Unitarian ministers and churches. Dr. E. A. Payne, in an unpublished monograph on John Stanger (1742-1823), who was minister in Bessels Green for fifty-seven years, provides a vivid illustration

of the church life of the period and the conflicts which had to be faced. Stanger was a member of the Moulton General Baptist church, of which his father, a farmer, was the elder. In early manhood he was distressed by "the lack of vital power and godliness" which he found in the General Baptist churches, and impressed by "the heart religion and the power of godliness" among the Particular Baptists. After varied experiences he felt called to the ministry, and the first step, according to General Baptist practice, was to obtain, if possible, the approval of his home church. To test his preaching gifts, the Moulton church invited him to conduct a morning service. His trial sermon went on for two and a half hours. Stanger then broke off to ask permission to complete it on the following Sunday. However, the church approved him, and in 1766 he was invited to join John Burge as assistant in the Bessels Green General Baptist church. It was not a happy settlement. He grew increasingly distressed by the teaching of his senior and the church's lack of evangelism, and four years later he and a number of members seceded and formed a new General Baptist church, erecting the present chapel on the green. He and his church joined the New Connexion and later they moved still further and were received into the Kent and Sussex Particular Baptist Association which had been formed in 1779.

Similar stresses and conflicts to those experienced by Stanger continued to harass the Kent and Sussex General Baptist churches, and partly explain why the Association, re-formed in 1768, achieved so little. The first meeting was held at Canterbury. The twelve member churches which attended were represented by twenty-four delegates. The reports from the churches were depressing reading. Dover had no elder and only one deacon; Deal and Folkestone-Hythe were in a low condition; Smarden had two deacons but no elder; the elder of the Canterbury church was aged and worn out; the Isle of Thanet church was without a pastor and their one deacon was old and lived six miles away. The dearth of leaders complained of so often before was now even more acute and it is not surprising that the problem of producing men for the ministry should be discussed at several subsequent meetings of the Association, but without fruitful result. It was at this first meeting that two churches, Headcorn and the Isle of Thanet,

announced that they were thinking of introducing hymn-singing into their worship. It is surprising that there seem to have been no comments upon this, in view of the widespread opposition to congregational singing among the General Baptists.

From the beginning the Association met in alternate years at Canterbury and Headcorn. The records of the meetings for the next thirty years reveal little of the impulse to evangelism which was stirring in the land. In 1769 there was a discussion on the dispute at Bessels Green between Stanger and John Burge. Almost all the delegates supported the senior man. A few questions from churches were answered. It was recommended that "for the reputation of the ministry" a preacher is to be accredited in writing by his own church before he preaches elsewhere; that a leaving member should take a letter of commendation from his own church; that the church should keep a regular register of births and deaths. It was decided by a majority that persons should not be baptised if they were not going to join a Baptist church, and it was decided unanimously that hands must be laid upon the newly baptised before they can be received into the church. It was also agreed that a person ordained to the office of preacher is not thereby qualified to administer the Lord's Supper. "Because we consider the ordinance is a mystery, great decency and order should be preserved, and we apprehend that if the rule which has been so long observed is broken it is impossible to foresee the fatal consequences". In 1786 the Association earnestly wished that "in this degenerate age our members would be particularly careful to refrain from sinful diversions such as card-playing, dancing, horse racing and cock fighting". After the Association had been meeting for nine years it recommended its churches to send delegates to the General Assembly, "which hath been too much neglected", which is an indication of the waning hold of the Assembly on many of its constituent churches. It was not only the Kent churches whose ties with the Assembly were loosening. The 1790 Assembly was attended by representatives from only 29 churches from the whole of the country, and of these 10 were from Kent and 4 from Sussex.

In the closing decades of the century the Kent churches owed much to the ministry of Sampson Kingsford, who ministered in the Canterbury church from 1771 to 1821. When he was

only twenty-one years of age the church appointed him to represent them at the 1771 Assembly, but he was not ordained elder till 1781 and messenger four years later. But even in 1771 he was the acknowledged leader of the Canterbury church, and his influence became increasingly felt in the Association and in the Assembly. He served the churches with unwearying devotion for over fifty years, giving generously of his time and wisdom and money, and often travelling at the request of the Assembly to help churches in other counties. One of the ideas he proposed to the Assembly was commended to the churches. He suggested six questions to be discussed one by one at successive church meetings. They deal with dissensions in the church, the necessity of work among the young, the quality of their religious life, and the enforcement of discipline. The fifth question asks whether "the Word of God is statedly and constantly administered among you, and do your members steadily attend to the Word". And finally, "are your poor and needy members attended to with brotherly care and tenderness". He also asked whether there were any masters or mistresses who wanted servants or journeymen or apprentices, and also "whether there be any openings for employment in our connexion". For many years these questions were used in the Association churches as a yardstick by which to measure their spiritual state, and the annual reports from the churches are in effect the answers they give to these six questions. On the whole the effects were salutary in helping to stir the churches out of their impoverished condition. The second half of the last question was designed to bring together employers and members of churches who move to other districts. For several years the Association minutes included a list of employers who need assistants and of workers who need employment.

Another stimulus was provided in 1780 by the division of the Association into an East Kent and a West Kent group for the purpose of holding quarterly meetings. These forerunners of our present District meetings survived for nearly forty years. There was evidently a warm spirit between the churches of these smaller areas, a readiness to help any church in difficulty or without a pastor. The spiritual poverty of the churches and the paucity of ministers and leaders was often discussed here as in the Association. Several questions were debated which

are still discussed at District Meetings nearly 200 years later. How can we instruct and hold our young people? How can church attendance be improved? More variety in the services is suggested, and better, brighter, and even shorter sermons. Is visiting an essential part of a pastor's calling? It was held that a Pastor should visit the homes of those connected with the church at least once a year and there read and expound the scriptures and pray. In 1781 it was proposed that "churches should pay their removal costs of the pastors". It was high time this became the general practice, for with their meagre stipends, if any, removal was a heavy burden. It was made even more difficult because a church was not content with one or two visits from a prospective pastor, but expected him to stay among them for weeks and even for months before deciding, and the decision was by no means always favourable. In 1786 'cricketing' was added to the list of sinful pursuits from which the church member should abstain.

The question of evangelism was considered and it was asserted that little could be done because "we already have more places to supply than we have ministers". But something was achieved. The visits of Sampson Kingsford and others to small and struggling causes like Stelling, Sandwich and Birchington, maintained a witness in places where otherwise it might have dropped out. But before the end of the century these District Meetings were again preoccupied with the old themes of spiritual poverty, poor attendance at worship and dearth of leaders. In East Kent only three churches were regular at District Meetings.

What happened in the Districts was happening in the Association, as one would expect. There were encouraging features. The work at Tunbridge Wells was revived. Chatham was able to renew the lease of their premises for ninety-nine years and to build a baptistry and three vestries. The Wingham church had fallen into low water, but it was now proposed to re-open their meeting-house for worship. The Deal church attempted to revive the work at Sandwich. They re-opened and decorated the meeting-house, and commenced services, but the place "was much damaged by ill-disposed persons" and the services were not continued. But the Association as a whole was losing ground. Churches were without elders and some without deacons. Members were drawn away by the

vigorous evangelism of the Particular Baptists and the Independents. Attendance at Association meetings dwindled, rarely more than 10 churches being represented and often fewer. In the course of the thirty-one years since the Association was reformed two new churches were added, Yalding and Ramsgate, but Ramsgate soon dropped out and Yalding was a weak church and had to be constantly supported by neighbouring churches. Six other churches resigned. Eythorne joined the New Connexion, and Rotherfield, Stelling, Sevenoaks, Marden and Deptford had ceased to attend. The General Baptists of Kent, and of the whole country, entered the nineteenth century a waning and indeed a dying force.

CHAPTER VI

THE KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES 1779 TO 1799

WE now turn from the General Baptists to the other stream of Baptist life. The Particular Baptists were much stronger than the General Baptists in the country as a whole, but Kent and Sussex were General Baptist strongholds. The Particular Baptist Association formed earlier in 1700 could only muster five churches. It did not last very long and it left few records of its meetings and activities. But the Particular Baptists had been steadily gaining strength. From time to time there were secessions from the General Baptist churches of groups who were dissatisfied with the teaching they were receiving and most of these joined the nearest Particular Baptist church or formed themselves into a new Particular Baptist church. The revived evangelical note among the leaders of the Particular Baptists in the second half of the century brought new life to the churches. They began to throw off the shackles of hyper-Calvinism and recover their former zeal for evangelism.

In Kent and Sussex this quickened life found expression in the formation of a Kent and Sussex Association. In a meeting at Ashford in March, 1779, representatives of four churches met, viz., Ashford, Rye, Sandhurst and Smarden. Benjamin Morgan, an elder of the Ashford church, was the moving spirit. He drew up the rules for the Association and these were signed by the representatives of the four churches. The Rotherfield, Tenterden and Wivelsfield churches were represented, but apparently they were there as observers only and were not received into membership until the next meeting of the Association held in June of that same year.

The five churches which had formed the 1700 Association were Ashford, Smarden, Rolvenden, Biddenden and Canterbury. The first three of these are present in 1779, for Rolvenden and Sandhurst are different names for the same church. The membership was scattered in a number of places. In 1700 Rolvenden was regarded as the centre, but by 1779 Sandhurst had taken the leading place, largely owing to the competent leadership of the Sandhurst minister William Copping (1757-1805), and the church was now called the Sandhurst church. The Biddenden Particular Baptists had been worshipping with the Smarden church since 1717 and were no longer regarded as a separate church. That Canterbury Particular Baptists do not appear on the lists of the Association till 1827 may appear surprising, but the Northgate church which was a member of the 1700 Association is said to have died out by 1775, and it was a new cause which was welcomed in 1827. Rye is the only newcomer. This church was formed by 11 members who separated from the Sandhurst church in 1750 over the question of the laying of hands on the newly baptised. The cause prospered and in 1754 they were able to build a chapel. Here men sat in one gallery and women in another. In the body of the building members sat on forms unless they were willing to build their own pews.

The records of the first meeting of the Association preface the rules by a statement of the doctrinal position of the member churches. "We, the ministers and members of the Baptist denomination, representing our various churches holding the doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, with the doctrines of personal election, particular redemption, effectual vocation, and final perseverance of the saints . . . have entered the several churches into an Association".

The purpose of the Association was "to cultivate friendly acquaintance between ministers and churches for their edification, to aid each other in the work of God, to cement the churches in love and harmony for the glory of God, the advancement of His interests, and the peace and prosperity of each other". The Association disclaims "all manner of superiority and lordly authority in matters of faith and practice . . . but by way of advice and counsel to strengthen the hands . . ." They will meet once a year and each church is asked to send a report of its spiritual state.

The three churches received in the June meeting of the Association were newly formed churches. The Wivelsfield church was the one formed by Henry Booker when he was ejected from the Ditchling church for his Calvinist views. It was formed in 1763. Booker was ordained pastor in 1768 and served the church for 21 years. The Rotherfield church, near Crowborough, was formed in 1774 and must have made considerable progress, for it was strong enough to entertain the Association in 1780 and 1798. The Tenterden church was formed in 1775 by a group which hived off from the General Baptist church when it invited a Unitarian to the pastorate. They built Zion, the present chapel, the year after.

In the next twenty years the Association slowly but steadily gained strength. There is nothing spectacular to report and there is no large increase of membership, but the records of baptisms give evidence of persistent evangelism. Only twice in the next forty-five years do the annual returns fail to show a net increase of membership. This is not due to any laxity in revising the church rolls. Discipline was strict and there was little hesitation in withdrawing from a member whose conduct was accounted unworthy or who failed in faithful attendance at worship. In 1781 the scribe could report 41 baptisms from 7 churches.

In 1782 the Battle church was admitted. This cause was one of many Independent churches established by George Gilbert of Heathfield, whose unremitting and effective evangelism had earned for him the title of "Apostle of Sussex". By 1779 he had gathered more than 50 people together for the monthly communion service. Several members became converts to believers' baptism, including William Vidler, the son of a local stone mason. He and six others were baptised at Rye and seceded from the Independent cause to form a Particular Baptist church in 1780, inviting Vidler to be their pastor. He was a man of outstanding gifts of mind and character and in ten years had gathered a church of 150 members. He was to prove a thorn in the flesh of the Association even as Matthew Caffyn had been to the General Baptist Association 100 years earlier. In 1750 the Folkestone church, which had begun in 1728 as a group in membership with Canterbury, became a separate church and joined the Association. In 1785 the Lewes church applied for membership. This Particular Baptist

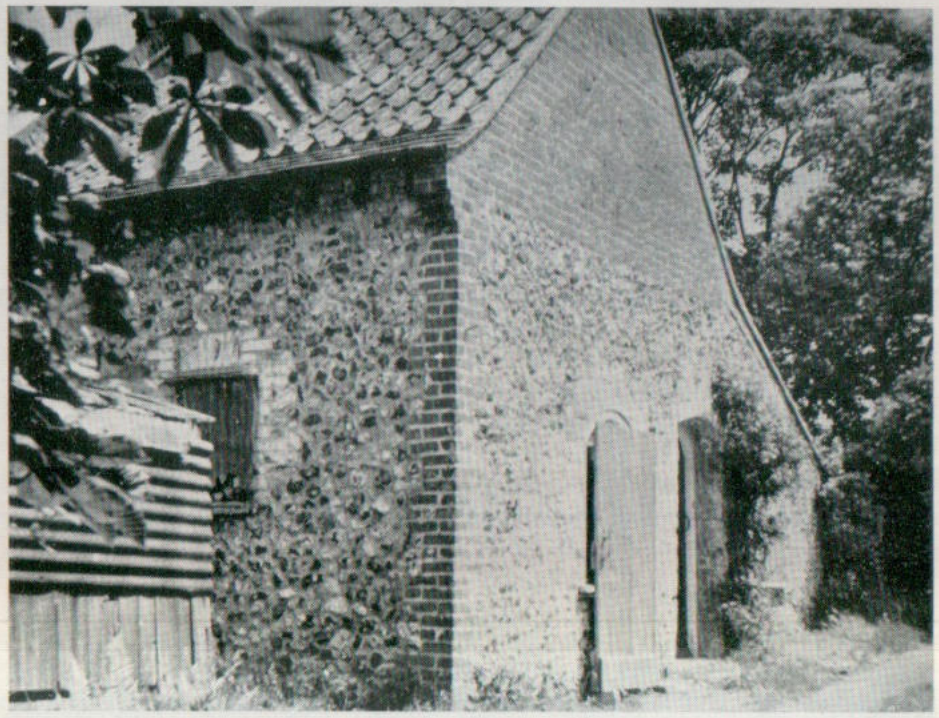
church, the forerunner of the Eastgate church, was founded by Joseph Middleton. He had been minister of the Countess of Huntingdon's church in Lewes, but becoming convinced that the baptism of believers was Scriptural he and 26 other members were ejected. The church they formed was Calvinist in doctrine but practised open communion. Hence their reception was conditional in that "the churches in the Association being all for strict communion and the church at Lewes being open communion, and we, judging by the Word and Testimony that such a church is not a complete organised church, cannot dismiss any of our members to them or receive any of their members with a dismission from Lewes". In 1788 the Brighthelmstone church was received. This was formed in 1766 and 'Salem' was built in Bond Street on the same site on which the present Strict Baptist church stands.

Bessels Green is the next church to join. Stanger and his church had been moving more and more towards the Calvinist position. They applied for membership in 1790 but the Association acted cautiously, asking the church to send a letter to the Associated churches at their next meeting, declaring explicitly their faith and order. This proved satisfactory and the church was accepted.

Up to this year, 1791, the minutes of the meetings had been signed by all attending, but for the first time they were signed by the moderator in the name of all. Another item will interest those whose speeches have been mutilated in Press reports. Dr. Rippon had reprinted the Association letter in his Annual Register, but had made several alterations. The Association leaders sent him a letter of mild protest. "Most people are fond of their own children, at least they would not be pleased if their neighbours cut off their limbs, though they could have no objection to having them washed and made more comely. This letter is a babe for which we all stand father. . . Our only wish then, Sir, is that you let it enjoy all its limbs and features".

1792 was a memorable year for Baptists. It was the year in which the Baptist Missionary Society was founded. The Association at its next meeting expressed "hearty approval of the Particular Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen instituted by the Northamptonshire Association, and will do all in its power to encourage the cause".

EYTHORNE
Cottage meeting place until the adjoining chapel added in 1755



SHALLOWS
Cottage meeting place of Margate and St. Peter's Baptists 1690-1750

DITCHLING
Cottage and chapel used for worship from at least 1672 until to-day

BESSELS GREEN
The original chapel and manse built in 1700

In the same year the Folkestone church formed a corresponding society in aid of the missionary work, and arranged to hold monthly missionary prayer meetings, with a collection.

Three more churches were to join the Association by the end of the century. Chatham is one of the oldest Particular Baptist churches in Kent. There was a church there in 1644, the forerunner of Zion, the present Clover Street church. The church had taken no part in the 1700 Association. John Knott, a baker, and son of John Knott of Eythorne, was pastor from 1776-1817. The church prospered under him and in 1793 he was able to lead the church into the Association. A Particular Baptist church was formed in Handcross in 1780. Twelve years later when it joined the Association it had grown to 67 members. Wilmington was received in 1797. This church is better known to us under the name of Eynsford. The church originated in Wilmington in 1775, but moved to Eynsford in 1792. John Stanger was persuaded to come over from Bessels Green to help them. In spite of violent opposition the cause grew and in 1802 invited John Rogers to begin his 38 years of notable service among them.

Before the century ended the Association was deeply disturbed by the defection of William Vidler. He was a gifted preacher and writer, much loved and honoured in his own church and beyond it. The Association had chosen him as moderator in 1791 and designated him as preacher in 1793. As early as 1784 he had been troubled by doubts of the orthodox belief in eternal punishment and in the Godhead of the Son. The sermons and writings of Elhanan Winchester, an American who had come to England to spread Unitarian views, had greatly influenced him. In 1792 he became convinced of the truth of Universalism, and when he put his new views before his church 153 of the 168 members supported him with their votes. Such defection was almost a commonplace among the General Baptists, but it was rare among the Particular Baptists. It was a grieved and shocked Association which voted that Vidler and his followers be expelled from the Association. He only stayed in Battle a few months after this, moving to Bishopsgate as assistant to Winchester and eventually succeeding him. He became recognised as the leading figure in English Unitarianism.[9] In 1802 the General Assembly received Vidler and the Battle church as members by 13 votes

to 5. This admission of avowed Unitarians made plain how far the General Baptists had moved from their original beliefs.

However, the century ends more hopefully than it began. The reviving of evangelism had brought new life and new hopes. This was true to some extent of the General Baptist churches and it was markedly evident among the Particular Baptists. There was a reaching out to neighbouring districts which led to the formation of a number of new churches. Some ministers were outstanding in this work. Vidler in his earlier ministry had been indefatigable in the Battle area. He regularly preached six times a week, taking services in villages as much as ten miles away. But the outstanding evangelist of this period is John Stanger. It was he who persuaded the 1796 Association to set up a committee "to consider what can be done to assist each other in preaching the Gospel in the villages". But he did not wait for a committee. His work at Eynsford has already been mentioned. But before that he had opened a place for worship in Brasted, preaching there regularly until a church was formed and a minister appointed. He had begun services in Westerham and Penshurst. He built up Baptist communities in Down, Tatfield and Crockenhill. Early in the next century he was evangelising in Ightham, Ide Hill, Borough Green and Seal. He travelled literally thousands of miles, mostly on foot, and many of the causes he started are active today.

Evangelism was not left entirely to the initiative of individuals. In June, 1798, several Calvinist ministers, both Independent and Baptist, formed a union of Independent and Baptist ministers in West Kent for the further spread of the Gospel. A fund was opened to pay for the hire of rooms and the cost of travelling, and a thorough survey was planned of the needs of the various areas of the county. The report of this meeting was signed by 28 ministers. They include John Stanger, John Knott of Chatham and John Rogers of Eynsford, but the majority were Independents. Work was started in a number of places, among them being Wrotham, Goudhurst, West Malling, Ryarsh and Meopham, all of which continue as Baptist churches to this day. It is to be regretted that this Union lasted but twenty years, but it is heartening to realise that such a fellowship of service was possible between Independents and Baptists 160 years ago. The existence of this

Union for such a purpose is as strong a proof as one could desire of the reality of the revival of evangelism in England.

We have now followed the life of two Associations to the end of the eighteenth century. The General Baptist Association has already a long history behind it. It was in existence in 1657, and, apart from the enforced cessation of its meetings during the days of persecution and a possible omission of certain annual meetings in the middle of the century, its life has been continuous. The separation in 1717 of a group of East Kent churches from the main body was only a temporary division. The Particular Baptist Association has had but twenty years in existence.

In 1796 the strength of the two Associations was almost equal as regards the number of churches. There were twelve Particular Baptist churches,

Ashford	Tenterden	Handcross
Chatham	Sandhurst	Rye
Folkestone	Battle	Lewes
Smarden	Brighthelmstone	Wivelsfield

They had added five churches in the twenty years. The General Baptists could muster thirteen churches, having lost five members since 1768. Only five of them attended the 1796 meetings —Canterbury, Cranbrook, Dover, Headcorn and Smarden-Staplehurst. Bessels Green, Chatham and Yalding sent letters, but there was neither representative nor word from Hythe, Maidstone, Ramsgate, Tunbridge Wells and Wingham. The close correspondence of their numerical strength is no measure of the real strength of the Associations. The General Baptist churches were falling away. Pastors were hard to find. The Unitarian influence was gaining strength and the future was regarded with misgiving. The Particular Baptist churches were vigorous, outreaching, and year after year the membership of their churches was increasing.

Up to this time there is rarely any reference to current affairs in the records of either Association. It is a somewhat odd experience after reading the secular history of a period to turn to Association proceedings and find no reference to the stirring events of the times. There is an occasional note concerning the work of the Dissenting Deputies on behalf of Nonconformists, and a motion supporting the anti-slavery

movement, but no notice is recorded of the seven years war with France which ended in the conquest of Canada, nor of the founding of the Indian Empire and the War of Independence and the loss of the American colonies. There is silence on the enclosures of common land and the revolution in industrial methods which was to rob generations of workers of their independence. No mention is made of the French Revolution, which made the authorities in England so terrified of the word 'reform' that the bettering of social conditions was delayed for decades. It is true that the Association met for a specific purpose, for mutual assistance and encouragement in their Christian life and service, but the proceedings give an impression of remoteness from the rich, exciting life around them. Yet in fairness there are other facts to be taken into account. There was a keen sensitivity to suffering and need, numerous philanthropic societies were founded, a beginning was made with prison reform, new hospitals were built and a considerable advance was made in education, except in the Universities. A new attitude to children revealed itself in the care of foundling children and the rapid growth of Sunday Schools. Very few of these reforms were initiated by municipal or legislative action. Nearly all of them were the work of devoted men and women in the churches, Baptists among them, who had learned to share the compassionate spirit of their Master.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHARACTER AND VALUE OF AN ASSOCIATION

BOTH the General and the Particular churches found it worth while to join in Associations. The general outline of their meetings was similar. The chief differences were that the Particular Baptists included the singing of hymns and each year sent a letter to the churches, while the General Baptists eschewed hymns and occasionally sent a question to the churches to be discussed by them in order that it might be thoroughly debated at the next annual meetings. The General Baptist records give only the bare bones of Association life, and the fuller accounts of the Particular Baptist meetings are better able to convey something of the warm and heartening fellowship which the delegates undoubtedly enjoyed.

Here is an outline of the Kent and Sussex Particular Baptist Association meetings at Bessels Green in 1796, when 21 delegates were present from 11 churches.

Tues.	3.0	Scripture, prayer, hymn. Roll-call of delegates. Moderator chosen (usually the minister of the welcoming church). Scribe for the year appointed. Articles of association read. Reports from the churches considered.
	7.0	Public worship. Hymn, prayer, hymn, sermon, hymn, prayer.
Wed.	5.0	Prayers. Circular letter examined and approved.
	9.30	Business.
	10.30	Public worship. As above.
	3.30	Business, including choice of the writer of the next year's circular letter.
	7.0	Public worship. As above.

The delegates stayed at local inns, and it is sometimes

stressed that this should be arranged as economically as possible. At this 1796 meeting a resolution was passed that in future no hot meals be provided for the delegates. The main features of such an assembly are not very different from our modern usage, but we do not now have a session at 5.0 in the morning, and we would have noted that there were no women present.

At this period the number of delegates was never large. Yet it is surprising that even this number was able to attend. There were few, if any, delegates who were not earning their daily bread. It could not have been easy to find those who were able and willing to make the sacrifice entailed in two days absence from work. Distances were considerable and the roads notoriously bad. In winter it was impossible to travel on any but the few turnpike roads except on foot or horseback. It is a tribute to the value of the Association meetings that 21 delegates were willing to face the expense and difficulties of attending. What was it that our fathers found of value in these assemblings?

First, they found fellowship. Churches were isolated, and the Association took them out of their narrow circle and enabled them to think and pray with others. Especially would it be appreciated by the ministers. Then, as now, it provided a valued opportunity to talk over their difficulties and problems, and to listen to other voices than their own. The sense of the oneness of their churches was strengthened as the reports from the churches were read and the concern of one became the concern of all. Unity was often shown in practical ways. Churches drew up plans for their pastors to supply a ministry to pastorless churches. Special cases of need, as when a meeting-house needed to be built, were considered and, if approved, the churches were urged to subscribe and the minister of the church was given authorisation to collect from churches outside the area. The 'chapel case' is no modern institution.

Secondly, the Association could often exercise a reconciling and uniting influence. From time to time differences and disputes arose. Churches fell out among themselves, misunderstandings grew up between pastor and people. Often the churches appealed to the Association for help, and one or more messengers were sent in the Association's name. How

far the Association could intervene when their good offices were not sought varied at different times and in different places, for the degree of its authority depended very much on the quality of its leaders at the time. But usually the Association had no hesitation in stepping in when the peace of the churches was concerned.

A number of disputes arose over certain marginal beliefs or practices about which there was no common mind among the churches. One of these was the laying on of hands. For the greater part of Baptist history the laying on of hands has been enjoined and practised at the ordaining of pastors and deacons. There was less agreement as to whether it was essential according to the Scriptures that hands should be laid on the newly baptised. It does not appear to have been practised until the beginning of the Civil wars when it was noted that the apostles laid hands on the newly baptised. The conclusion was reached that "as God has promised to give His Spirit to all that are called by the Lord, so He hath appointed a solemn way . . . for the reception thereof". Some of the General Baptist Confessions of Faith enjoin it, but the Particular Baptists did not commit themselves officially. Both communities practised it until the end of the eighteenth century, but there were always those who disagreed with the majority and unhappy situations arose. Sometimes the situation was decidedly odd. Charles Lloyd was converted to Baptist views when he was a Presbyterian student. He wished to enter the Baptist ministry and was invited in 1690 to the Ditchling church. He at once ran into difficulties over ordination. He had been ordained but not with the laying on of hands, in which he did not believe. When the church realised this they refused to confirm their call to him to be their minister, and would only accept him as preacher and teacher. All the time he was there the sacrament was administered by a neighbouring elder. In addition he was counting on being baptised in the Ditchling meeting-house, but the church would not allow this unless he agreed to the laying on of hands at his baptism, a practice which he believed had not Scriptural sanction. Yet when he was baptised in a neighbouring church which did not insist on the laying on of hands the Ditchling church received him into membership.

In 1818 the Horsham General Baptist church passed a resolution that the church return to its original mode of admitting

members by baptism and the laying on of hands. In future no one was to be admitted without this and "those that have been admitted without the laying on of hands, having been lettered off from other churches, can no longer be considered members unless they submit to the rite". A considerable part of the Horsham church was then worshipping at Billingshurst and this ruling affected 13 of their members. They objected to the ceremony because "now the Holy Spirit was no longer confined by it, it had become a meaningless and empty form". The result was that the Billingshurst members separated themselves from the Horsham community and formed a separate church.

Singing hymns, the washing of feet, the ordination of deacons were other subjects about which there were dissensions. Some of the ministers and churches felt so strongly on these minor issues that they refused association with their brethren, and the Association could often exercise a moderating and healing influence. There are not infrequent appeals to the member churches to be true "to the foundations of our faith, which our fathers avowed at the commencement of the Association", but "this does not mean that all churches of the Association agree in every minor detail". The "peace of the churches" is often referred to in both General and Particular Baptist meetings. "We have much reason for humiliation and mourning for the disaffection and contentions complained of by several of our churches". (Particular Baptist Association 1798). In the same year Lewes reports to the Association "that through the kindness of God, we, as a church, are much more peaceable and harmonious than we have been". The minutes of the 1812 Association meetings record that the reading of the letters from the churches "excited emotions of joy and sorrow. Peace was enjoyed in the churches, except one, where distraction at present prevails". Ten years later the subject of the Association letter was, "What are the best means of promoting the peace of the churches?" When the reports from the churches reveal that it has been a year without dissension one can almost hear the sigh of relief in the meeting. One dreads to think of the parlous state of the eighteenth century Baptists if there had been no Association to promote intercourse, understanding and toleration.

The third outstanding value of the Association was as guide and counsellor. The Associations, like the Assemblies, make

it clear that their function is not to lay down the law in matters of faith and practice but to give advice and counsel. They fulfilled this function chiefly in two ways. The annual Association letter was one of the means. This was partly a response to the reports from the churches, but chiefly a message written by one of the ministers on a subject chosen by the writer or sometimes suggested by the Association. It could be written at leisure during the year and was read to the Association at its first session on Wednesday morning. It was discussed, amended if thought desirable, and finally approved for distribution to the member churches. A wide variety of subjects was dealt with in the course of the years, such as communion with God, the evidences of grace in the believer's heart, the duties of church officers and members, the duty which associated churches have to one another, a fourfold view of God. These letters were continued till 1891. They were not hasty articles, dashed off in an hour or so, but serious documents of considerable length. They averaged about 6,000 words, but could be much longer. To us they are for the most part dull and wordy reading, but they are steeped in Scripture and provided the churches with the only text-books on theology, Scripture exposition and Christian ethics that most of them would ever know. For the most part they were treated seriously. They were read and expounded by the ministers to the various worshipping groups which formed a church and must have been a formative influence in the church life of that day.

The second way in which the church received counsel from the Association was by question and answer. From very early on, as we have seen, the churches were sending in questions to the Association and to the Assembly. These were debated and voted on. They covered a wide field of interest, seeking advice on matters of belief, church order and practice and the duties and behaviour of church members. Here is a question asked in 1689. "What is to be done to those members who will not contribute to the necessary expenses of the church, according to their ability?" Answer: "Upon clear proof, the persons so offending should be admonished; and if no reformation appears, the church should withdraw from them". And this is a question answered in 1789. "A girl, now between nine and ten years of age, about a year and a half since professed to have received the Gospel: and is desirous of attending the ordinance

of baptism. She is well approved among the brethren where she resides, both as to her conversion and her conversation. Would it be prudent in these circumstances to baptise her?" The result recorded is "Yes 17, No 3, Neuter 2".[10] Sometimes the discussions are recorded in much detail and it is evident that the questions were thoroughly debated, arguments for and against were clearly stated and a vote taken. All such decisions were reported to all the churches in the Association.

The results of such debates must have been invaluable in churches which had little else to guide them at this time. Apart from the encouragement to smaller causes in knowing that there was always an organisation they could turn to when uncertain or in need, the result was to build up a generally accepted standard of faith and order. The answers were usually accepted as authoritative, and precedents were established which became the traditional practice of the denomination. Eccentricities and oddities had less opportunity to take root. Inevitably this function of an Association gradually waned in importance. Time settled many vexed questions and opened up many other sources of guidance. But it has never ceased to exist. Associations still receive requests for guidance when difficult circumstances arise, and these are carefully discussed by the executive or the committee or even on occasion by all the delegates to the annual meetings.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE KENT ASSOCIATION OF GENERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES

WHEN the nineteenth century opened there were three main groups of Baptists in Britain. They were the General Baptists of the New Connexion, the General Baptists of the General Baptist Assembly and the Particular Baptists. In this chapter, after a brief survey of the first group, we consider the closing years of the Kent and Sussex General Baptists.

The General Baptists of the New Connexion

The New Connexion was brought into being in 1770 by the vision and faith of Dan Taylor. Its purpose was to rebuild the General Baptist churches on their original foundations and to revive their evangelical zeal. After an uncertain beginning it slowly grew in strength, both by accession from former General Assembly churches and by the formation of new ones. By 1793 it had 32 churches in its membership, which was about the same numerical strength as the General Assembly gathered. In 1811 the General Assembly numbered 21 churches and the New Connexion 51. It did much in establishing local conferences of ministers and others and these developed into Associations. Its concern for the welfare and education of the ministry has been referred to earlier. In 1816 the New Connexion founded the General Baptist Missionary Society, with the devoted J. G. Pike as secretary. By then the members of the New Connexion were almost the only Baptists who were maintaining the traditional beliefs of the General Baptists, for the General Assembly churches, while in most cases continuing to practice believers' baptism, had lapsed into Unitarianism. By 1840 its work had spread into 22 counties, though none of its churches were in North or South-West England, nor in Wales.

The New Connexion made little direct impact on the Kent and Sussex churches.

The General Baptist Churches in Kent and Sussex

This second group is composed of churches who remained faithful to the General Assembly. We are only concerned here with the churches of Kent and Sussex, who formed more than half the Assembly membership. It was a tragedy for the Baptist cause in the South that the two most gifted and forceful figures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Caffyn of Horsham and Vidler of Battle, used their wide influence to lead the churches toward Unitarianism, and that Sampson Kingsford, the outstanding leader of the East Kent Baptists for fifty years, should be a wholehearted supporter of the General Assembly as it moved away from the Trinitarian faith.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Assembly was not strong. In 1802 there were only 18 churches represented at the Assembly meetings, and in 1822 there were only 40 member churches, and this was a nominal membership. Only five of the Kent and Sussex churches attended regularly. By that time the Assembly had openly avowed its Unitarian beliefs. It was possible for a speaker at the 1815 Assembly to assert that "Unitarianism may surely be called the cause of the General Baptists". The Assembly continues to meet annually up to the present time, and retains the original title for legal purposes connected with property, but it has no connection with present day Baptists and all its members are Unitarian. The relation of the Sussex and Kent churches to the Assembly had always been close, and what was happening in the Assembly was paralleled in the Sussex churches and the Kent Association.

At this period the Sussex churches were not part of the Kent Association and apparently had no Association of their own but were content with their membership of the London Assemblies. There were seven of these Sussex churches. They had been strongly influenced by Caffyn in the seventeenth century and by their membership of the Assembly, and were anti-Trinitarian. It is not usually possible to state the date when any particular church became Unitarian, for the conversion was gradual. Battle is the most clearly dated, in that it followed Vidler out of the Particular Baptist Association in

1798, and became a regular attendant at the Assemblies. This church was dissolved by 1836.[11] Horsham, Caffyn's home church, was accepted as a Unitarian church by the end of the eighteenth century, and Billingshurst also, for the Billingshurst and Horsham causes were then one church. Ditchling had been a strong supporter of Caffyn from 1693 onwards and in 1790 it invited a Unitarian to its pastorate. Its Cuckfield branch, not then a separate church, followed Ditchling's lead. This was a weak cause and closed down in 1820. The Lewes General Baptist community worshipping at Southover united with the Westgate Street church in 1818, working with them to promote the Sussex Unitarian Society. The Chichester Church moved steadily towards Unitarianism, but its membership dwindled. In 1815 its Eastgate premises were closed and the surviving members worshipped with the Presbyterian church, which was virtually Unitarian. Northiam and Brighton were founded by Vidler and followed his lead.

Ditchling, Horsham, Billingshurst, Lewes and Northiam have survived and are included in the list of churches in the Unitarian Year-book. Thus by 1820 none of the Sussex Baptist churches had remained true to the foundations on which the General Baptist churches were founded, and they had no further direct influence on Baptist work in the two counties.

The story of the Kent Association churches is very similar. There were 14 churches in membership when the Association met in Canterbury in 1800. They were Canterbury, Dover, Deal, Smarden-Staplehurst, Headcorn, Ramsgate, Hythe, Wingham, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Yalding, Bessels Green, Cranbrook and Chatham. These churches were moving further from the orthodox faith. When Headcorn built a new chapel in 1819 it was inscribed "Unitarian Baptist Church" and when their pastor, Robert Pyall, died, the Association stated that "he was firm in his principles as a Unitarian Baptist". When the work at Cranbrook ran into difficulties, a Unitarian worker was called in to take the oversight of the cause, with the co-operation of the Unitarian friends at Maidstone. Most of the expenses were borne by the Sussex Unitarian Association.

The numbers attending the Association meetings fell very low. In 1824 it was reported that five churches had lapsed and gradually the Association became almost completely ineffective. All its churches, apart from Smarden and with the

possible exception of Ramsgate and Wingham, had moved into, or towards, Unitarianism. Some of them died out. Cranbrook, which had revived in the early years of the century, closed in 1873. Hythe, previously one with the Folkestone church, and becoming a separate church in 1769, does not appear at an Association meeting after 1800 and is never mentioned in Association minutes. Ramsgate had led a struggling existence for a number of years. It had 13 members in 1832, and three years later there is an odd statement in the minutes that there were now "13 members, of which 7 were non-existent". The church was disbanded in 1884. The church in Deal had pursued an erratic course, resigning from the Association and joining the New Connexion, rejoining the Association and attending the General Assembly. It was reported in 1824 that it had lapsed from the Association and after that it fades out of the scene. Tunbridge Wells had died out in 1813 and the Mount Ephraim property was sold. Canterbury, whose ministers were better known in Unitarian circles than in Baptist, survived almost to the end of the century. Its premises at Black Friars were sold for £140 which went to help the Unitarian Baptist church in Adrian Street, Dover. There is a particular sadness in the decease of this church. It was one of the earliest churches in the county, it had been led by devoted men and had exercised wide influence in Kent and elsewhere. The proposal in 1802 to revive the work at Wingham came to nothing, and Yalding led an uncertain existence with alternate periods of decay and revival. The General Baptist church in Maidstone had closed in 1796 and their building was taken over by a group of Particular Baptists from Chatham, and these formed a church there in the following year.

Five of the members of the 1800 meetings of the General Baptist Association have survived to this day. The Bessels Green church was a strong supporter of Caffyn and Vidler and was moving towards Unitarianism before the end of the last century. The Dover General Baptists were a strong community. When their new church was built in 1820 in Adrian Street, the morning congregations numbered some 400. Many members were Unitarian. The Chatham church built a new chapel about the beginning of the century. It was opened by Vidler and Sampson Kingsford and the hope was expressed

that "the cause of pure and rational religion may be revived in this place". In 1812 the church was no longer describing itself as a General Baptist church, but as the Unitarian Baptist, Hammond Hill, Chatham. These three churches exist today as Unitarian churches.

Only two members of the General Baptist Association remained in the Baptist denomination, Headcorn and Smarden. The Baptists of Headcorn had separated from the Smarden church because of their Unitarian sympathies as early as 1677. As we have seen, the chapel they built in 1819 was inscribed "Unitarian Baptist". But not all the members were satisfied with the position and after the death of Robert Pyall, who had been their pastor for nearly 25 years, the orthodox element grew stronger and in 1880 the church invited a Trinitarian minister. The Smarden church, almost certainly the oldest Baptist church in Kent, was hard beset at times, tested by both Unitarian and Particular Baptist influence, but it survived and eventually in 1892 joined the Kent and Sussex Particular Baptist Association.

This then is the story of the closing years of the first Baptist Association to be formed in Kent or Sussex. It began as the Kentish Association. The records show that it was well established in 1657, but the exact date of its founding is not known. Persecutions after the Restoration made Association life impossible, but the Association resumed its meetings at least by 1704 and this time included the Sussex churches. In 1717 a few East Kent churches separated, but when the Association was reorganised in 1768 we find it is called the Association of General Baptist churches in Kent and includes the churches which had separated in 1717 but omits the Sussex churches. It remained as the Kent Association to the end and thus had a continual existence, with minor interruptions, from at least 1657 till 1856, when it had long ceased to be Baptist except in name. It is impossible to fix a definite date for this, but by 1825 the Association was avowedly Unitarian. It was not a large Association. Its size varied considerably, but there were never more that 24 member churches at any one time, and it was rare for more than 12 churches to send delegates to the annual meetings. Some only sent one representative and this made it possible for all the delegates to be put up at the local inn.

The history of this Association is both depressing and

perplexing. It began so well. One remembers with gratitude to God the vigorous evangelism of the early days, and the inspiring fortitude shown under persecution. Then come the long years of apathy, of hesitant and reluctant evangelising, broken by occasional bursts of life and lightened by the fine work of individual ministers and churches, but never recovering the old energy and zest. Few new churches were added, and none since Vidler's zeal in the latter half of the eighteenth century resulted in the forming of churches in Northiam and Brighton. In the end only a handful survived, and survived to preach doctrines which were anathema to the founders of these churches.

Some of the reasons for this decline have been referred to earlier, the lack of a trained ministry, the almost impossible demands made on their ministers, the dissensions over minor issues and a national climate which detested 'enthusiasm' and worshipped 'reason'. But the major cause was the slow but persistent conversion of the churches to Unitarianism. It is that which constitutes a perplexing problem to which no entirely convincing answer has been given, viz. why the General Baptists were so susceptible to an influence that left their Particular brethren almost untouched. The answer to this is thought by some to arise from the objections of the General Baptists to any statement of belief that was not expressed in the language of Scripture. The list of doctrines held by the Particular Baptists which was read at all Association gatherings and printed in all their reports is headed by the doctrine "of three equal Persons in the Divine Essence". This is not Scriptural language, for the doctrine of the Trinity (itself a word not found in Scripture) was not formulated in the Scriptures. Thus the statement of their beliefs given by the General Baptists appears vague compared with the definite, detailed statement of the Particular Baptists. Contrast the description which the Kent General Baptist Association gives of the basis of their membership as "belief in the doctrines of Christ mentioned in Hebrews vi: 1, 2, and the doctrine of general redemption" with the statement read at every Kent and Sussex Particular Baptist Association meeting, and printed on the reports, that their members were those "Who maintain the important doctrines of three equal Persons in the Divine Essence—eternal and personal election—original guilt and depravity—particular

SMARDEN
The third chapel, built in 1841 (The first one built in 1726)

SEVENOAKS
Built 1887 (First chapel 1754)

BRIGHTON (FLORENCE ROAD)
Built 1898

MAIDSTONE (KNIGHTRIDER STREET)
Built 1907 (First chapel 1834)

redemption—free justification—efficacious grace—perseverance of the saints". Clearly one statement gives much more latitude of interpretation than the other. Yet the English Presbyterians, who were reared in a creed very similar to the Particular Baptists, were more completely won over to the Unitarian beliefs than were the General Baptists.

Dr. Underwood suggests that "the weakness on the question of the Incarnation which afflicted the General Baptists, and the way in which Matthew Caffyn absorbed certain points of Hoffmanite Christology, seem to be due to persistent Mennonite influence".[12] It is true that there was a variety of interpretations of the Person of Christ current among the Continental Ana-Baptists, and that the early General Baptists were in close touch with the Mennonite Ana-Baptists. But it is equally true that the English Baptists showed themselves quite capable of rejecting Ana-Baptist views which, in their judgement, did not accord with Scripture. Probably both the vagueness of their credal statements and the influences from the Continent helped to weaken the orthodox faith of the General Baptists. Another factor was the lack of leadership. At a time in the formative years of the Association when Caffyn was dominant there was no opponent of equal calibre, no Andrew Fuller to meet his arguments, no Dan Taylor to rally the faithful.

But an inquest does not restore life, and here we must take our leave of the First Association of Baptists to be formed in Kent or Sussex.

NOTE

The question is sometimes raised as to what became of the chapels and other premises of the General Baptists which became Unitarian. The answer is briefly this. In the first half of the 19th century by far the most effective members of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies were the Unitarian Presbyterians. Dissenters owe mainly to their efforts the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths. They had considerable influence in political circles. The growing tide of evangelism had awakened all the churches, the English Presbyterians among them. This led to a widespread demand that chapels now in Unitarian hands should be restored to those who held the faith the chapels were built to proclaim. The Unitarians countered by getting passed in 1844 the Dissenters' Chapels Bill, which granted possession of church premises to those who had used them for 25 years, except where specific religious doctrines were laid down in the

Trust Deeds. Bernard Manning gives a full account of this in *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies* (chapter v.).

Controversies between Baptists and Unitarians over properties were brought to an end in the early months of the 1914 war. An agreement was approved by the Assembly in 1916 whereby . . . all Trusts belonging to or under the control of the General Baptist Assembly were left undisturbed as far as the Baptist Union was concerned; four chapels were recognized as belonging to the Baptist Union and all other chapels listed in the Essex Hall Year-book for 1915 were recognized as belonging to the Unitarian denomination.

The Headcorn chapel was one of the above four.[13]

CHAPTER IX

THE KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES 1800 TO 1834

WE now turn to the third group, the Particular Baptists. These were by far the strongest element in Baptist life. Rippon estimates that in 1798 there were 326 Particular Baptist churches in England and 56 in Wales.[14] They were richly blessed in their leaders. A remarkable group of men were born around the middle of the eighteenth century who were used by God to transform the life of the Particular Baptist churches. Among them was John Rippon (1750-1836), who stirred the London ministers out of their lethargy, Dr. John Ryland (1753-1825), who exercised a great ministry in Northampton and in Bristol as minister of Broadmead and President of the Bristol Baptist College, and John Sutcliffe (1752-1814), who set the Northamptonshire Association praying for the success of the Gospel, and during his one long pastorate at Olney trained a number of men for the ministry. There was also Robert Hall (1764-1831), the scholar and outstanding preacher who succeeded Ryland at Broadmead, and Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) who, through his preaching and writing, did more than any other man to break through the hard crust of the prevailing rigid Calvinism and free men to preach the Gospel to all. Three of these men, Fuller, Ryland and Sutcliffe, were among the twelve who founded the Baptist Missionary Society on October 2nd, 1792. Fuller was secretary of the Society until his death in 1815, and together with Sutcliffe, his close friend and constant adviser, established it on an enduring foundation. They were indeed the gift of God to their generation.

It is the Association of the Particular Baptist churches in Kent and Sussex which will now be our sole concern and

doubtless it will be a relief to emerge from the perplexing task of unravelling the tangled relationship between the General and Particular Baptist churches.

The 1800 Association meetings at Rye were attended by seventeen delegates from the twelve member churches. This first meeting in the new century was evidently a profitable one, for the report ends, "We had a happy meeting; and we felt our souls united in brotherly love and godly esteem for each other". In the next ten years a number of churches were added. The church at St. Peter's, Broadstairs, was an offshoot of the church which had met for many years in the meeting place at Shallows. Here Thomas Cramp had gathered a church of 43 members. The Sevenoaks church had been formed in the middle of the previous century. Michael Bligh, one of the preachers at the Bessels Green Baptist church, preached a doctrine unacceptable to the church, and they forbade him to preach. He and eight others left and founded the Particular Baptist church which now worships at the Vine, Sevenoaks. The church at Shipley has not been mentioned before. It was founded early in the eighteenth century and by 1806 was known as the West Grinstead church, a village a couple of miles away with which it joined forces. It is interesting that the two representatives sent by this church to its first Association gathering bore the names of Richard and Matthew Caffyn. It is improbable that their formidable forebear, Matthew Caffyn, would have approved of his descendents being members and representatives of a community of Particular Baptists. Eythorne did not join the Association until 1806, though she had been a Particular Baptist church for over twenty years. The church had known some outstanding pastors, particularly John Knott, elder for 35 years, and now John Giles was at the height of his ministry. The membership had risen to 193 and congregations outgrew accommodation. Fortunately their singing annoyed a neighbouring landowner, and he offered to buy the chapel for £500 and give an acre of ground at a greater distance from his house, thus making it possible to build the chapel which stands today. The Maidstone church was accepted in the same year. It was formed in 1797, mostly of members of the Chatham Particular Baptist church who lived in the neighbourhood. This was known as the Old Rose Yard Meeting. George Bentlif was the minister of the 33 members. The

recently formed church at Lessness Heath, near Woolwich, was one of the churches in North-West Kent which were later included in the London Association. Battle, under James Kingsmill, was slowly recovering stability. The membership was only 18, almost the same number who had withdrawn from the church at Vidler's defection.

The Association proved to be a stalwart supporter of the B.M.S. The needs of the Society were frequently brought before the churches. Local Auxiliary Societies were established and a Kent Auxiliary was formed to link up and stimulate the local efforts. In 1813 the minutes record that we "note with pleasure the affectionate attention which is given by our churches to the support of the Baptist missionaries" and urge "the formation of a Missionary Auxiliary in every church". An appeal in 1819 ends thus: "We believe that in proportion as missionary zeal prevails or declines in an individual or community the state of religion can be fairly ascertained".

In the second decade Handcross, W. Grinstead, Rotherfield and Wivelsfield were struck off the roll under the rule that if a church sends no representative or letter for three consecutive years the church shall be regarded as lapsed. Other churches took their place, and six of them were new causes. Brenchley, in North-West Kent, was admitted in 1812. The next year Rye, another newly formed church, was received. The circumstances were unusual. There had been a Particular Baptist church in Rye since 1750. Thomas Purdy began his ministry there in 1767. He did a notable work, gathering a congregation from many villages around. By 1810 Purdy had been a minister for 43 years and his powers were failing, to the detriment of the cause. The church appointed a co-pastor of whom the old minister disapproved. In the end Purdy and nine others left the church and started services in his house. It was this church which asked to be admitted into the Association in 1813, and they were accepted "on account of the respect we have to its venerable pastor, who is the only minister living who formed this Association 35 years ago". These saddened closing years of a most faithful minister came to an end with his death in 1817. His followers drifted away and once again there was but one Rye church in fellowship with the Association. The next new cause to join was Sheerness. Services were begun here by Chatham friends and in 1812 a church was formed, mostly of

members of the Chatham church. The story of the Deal church is similar, but this time it was 18 members from Eythorne who formed the church in 1814. Jacob Martell, who had recently moved to Deal, was responsible for beginning the work here. He had been an Independent minister at Heathfield until he embraced Baptist views in 1809. He then moved to Burwash, built up a strong Particular Baptist church there and established preaching stations at Shovers Green and Wadhurst. The Borough Green church was formed in 1809 as a result of the evangelism of the Kent Union of Independents and Particular Baptists. Its most notable member was Alfred Saker (1814-1880). He joined the church in 1834 and was a deacon and Sunday School Superintendent until he went to the Cameroons in 1840. In this period Tenterden and Maidstone, who had lapsed, were readmitted. There were many evidences of life. Membership was increasing, new chapels were erected and old buildings were enlarged. Sunday Schools flourished and many new ones were started. Churches were sending out teachers into the surrounding villages where they taught hundreds of children to read the Bible.

In 1813 the Association made its first reference to an event which was to have far-reaching consequences in the life of all Baptists. It passed this resolution: "We cordially approve of the general principle of the Union among the Calvinist Baptist churches which has been recently under contemplation in London, and those ministers belonging to this Association who are present at the next meeting in London be our representatives". The Particular Baptists had never developed any central organisation which corresponded with the annual General Assembly of the General Baptist churches, but in 1811 the idea of such an Assembly was mooted as a bond of union between the churches. In 1812 a Particular Baptist Assembly was held in London. Representatives were present from 59 churches. The object of the Union was "to promote the cause of Christ in general, and the interests of the denomination in particular, with the primary view of the encouragement and support of the Baptist Mission". The building up of this Union was a slow and painful business. Churches and Associations were mostly content with independence and jealous of anything that would interfere with it, and there were strongly felt cleavages in the Particular Baptist ranks. Fuller's evangelical convictions were by no means universally accepted, and the familiar controversy over closed or open communion was soon to break out again with renewed vehemence. Yet thanks to the vigour and determination of a few devoted men the Union was kept in being against the day when a majority of Baptists should have learned its value and be prepared to give it wholehearted support. The Kent Association from the beginning was in no doubt as to the importance and rightness of the Union. The second largest group of delegates at its formation in 1812 came from Kent.

In this period in the records of the Association and of the churches the word 'distress' occurs from time to time. The reference is to economic conditions. The long drawn out war with revolutionary and Napoleonic France had hampered trade and caused widespread unemployment. Imports of European corn ceased and the price of bread soared. The meagre help given by ill-conceived Poor Laws affronted the dignity and independence of the labouring man and bitterness grew towards the governing classes. The situation was easier in the areas around the new industrial towns, where high wages in the factory forced farmers to pay their labourers enough to prevent them flocking into the towns. It was in rural areas like Kent and Sussex, almost untouched by industry, that the high prices of food and a starvation wage made their most grievous impact. There is no indication of the Association or the churches taking any steps to alleviate the plight in which many of their members found themselves, apart from collections for particular cases. The original emphasis on caring for the poor as the main function of the diaconate is no longer in evidence. It may be that the provision provided by the Poor Law and the host of philanthropic societies made less important the churches' part in relieving distress.

In 1816 the Association set up a Home Missions Society, as several other Associations had done. Its purpose was to aid needy churches and to further pioneer efforts. Work of this kind was stimulated by the founding of the B.M.S., for it was the answer made by missionary enthusiasts who were charged with caring for the heathen abroad but neglecting the heathen at home. Evangelisation and colportage societies were formed in several parts of the country. The Kent and Sussex Association had made a previous unsuccessful attempt to raise a fund

for this purpose and the churches were slow to respond to the new appeal. But the need for such an organisation had become unmistakable and the society became firmly established in the life of the Association and has continued, though in different form, to this day.

It should be noted that this was the first time that the Association, as part of its function of serving its member churches, had undertaken the responsibility of founding, supporting and administering an organisation. Hitherto it had been content to appeal to its members to support societies and causes founded and run by groups independent of the Association. When a church needed special help the Association urged its members to send gifts to this cause. Now the gifts are to be collected and administered by the Association.

Another minor, but not unimportant, innovation was inaugurated in 1806 when the Association elected John Rogers, of Eynsford, as its scribe. Up to then a different scribe had been chosen each year, and his duties were almost entirely confined to recording the transactions at the annual meetings and distributing copies of them to the churches. There was no one person responsible for maintaining coherence and continuity. Now the secretary was still elected annually but for many years it was the same man, John Rogers, who was returned to office.

Almost unnoticed another change had been introduced into the annual meetings. A session had always been devoted to debating and answering questions sent in by the churches, most of them on church order and procedure. As these gradually decreased the Association began to use the session for a discussion on a subject introduced by one of the ministers. The subjects they debated provide an interesting comparison with those we discuss at our meetings today, e.g., the best evidences of church prosperity, the scriptural evidences of the faith of God's elect, the obstacles which are in the way of sinners coming to Christ and the best means of removing them, the best antidotes to the fears of the children of God, the nature of communion with God.

The records of the Association in the years 1820-1834 continue to describe growth and progress. Ten more churches add their strength to its work, all of them, with the exception of Margate, being new churches. The Margate church shared a

common origin with the St. Peter's church in the Baptist church at Shallows. This was the name given to a chalkpit surrounded by trees midway between Margate and St. Peter's which was bought by Stephen Shallows in 1690. Probably it had been the place where the Baptists of Margate and St. Peter's met for worship in the days of persecution, but the Toleration Act of 1689 enabled them to worship openly. The congregation which met in a cottage at Shallows from 1690 until their chapel was built in 1750 was part of the Particular Baptist church which included Canterbury and Folkestone. In 1750 the Folkestone congregation became a separate church with the entire goodwill of the Canterbury and Shallows friends, and in 1762 the Shallows congregation also became independent. Their first pastor was Jonathan Purchis. There is uncertainty about the date of his coming to Shallows. His tombstone in St. John's churchyard, Margate, states that he was pastor at Shallows for 35 years. He died in 1800 and thus the date of his settlement is given as 1765, but he may well have ministered at Shallows for a considerable probationary period before he was ordained.

Mr. Purchis, who earned his living as a mechanic, is described as "a grave, solid preacher; plain, yet powerful; rich in doctrine and a man of holy life". It was not long before he opened up work in Margate and gathered a congregation to whom he preached Sunday mornings and evenings, leading the worship at Shallows in the afternoons. When he died in 1800, the church at Shallows then decided to divide, part going to Margate and part to St. Peter's. In any case the majority of the Shallows congregation would be living in one or the other of these places.

The Margate church was not received into the Association till 1827 but the St. Peter's church joined in 1801. The existence of a congregation here was due to the work of Thomas Cramp, a member of the Shallows church whom Purchis baptised and whom the church commissioned as a preacher. His home was in St. Peter's and he began to hold cottage meetings here. This was evidently in 1787, for the meetings to mark his ministerial Jubilee of fifty years' work in his native village were held in 1837. The work grew slowly and in 1797 a vacant Methodist chapel was rented for the services. It was this group of worshippers that the dispersing members of the Shallows church joined.

Two of the newly formed churches, Woolwich and Crayford, were later absorbed into the London Association. The remaining seven churches were brought into being in a variety of ways, and the value of the Home Missions Society becomes clearly apparent. In Dover a group of Particular Baptists worshipping in private houses desired to form themselves into a church. The Association came to their aid with a grant of £60 from the Home Missions Fund, and in 1822 a church was formed by 16 members of the Eythorne church who lived in the town, and the Pentside church was built. The church at The Brook, Chatham, was an offspring of the Chatham church, of which John Knott, a baker, and son of John Knott of Eythorne, had been minister for 27 years. He was succeeded by William Giles, who, when the church at The Brook was formed of 64 members from the mother church, went with them as their pastor. Another of the new churches was Canterbury. There had been two attempts in the eighteenth century to establish a Particular Baptist cause in the city but both had faded away. Another attempt, this time successful, was made in 1823 when a small group of Baptists bought the Round House Chapel, a disused place of worship belonging to the Methodists, adapted and furnished it and opened it for worship. A church was formed in 1825 with 14 members, some of whom had worshipped at Eythorne though living in Canterbury. This church is the forerunner of the present church. It was well established in 1840 when it had 77 members and 156 Sunday School scholars. The work in Brabourne started in 1814 when the Ashford church began services and a Sunday School in a disused bakehouse in the village. After a year's work there were 90 children in the Sunday School and an evening congregation of 50. In 1824 it became independent of Ashford after its disagreement with the mother church who had opened their communion table. It joined the Association in 1827. The Chatham church was responsible for starting work at Gravesend, where they hired a room in which their preachers conducted worship. The church was formed in 1827. The Association had a share in building up a church in Ramsgate, for when the Association heard at its 1832 meetings that work was beginning there they entrusted £30 to the ministers of St. Peter's, Margate, and Canterbury to further its progress. The church was formed in 1833 and the Cavendish Chapel

was built seven years later. The last of the new causes to join the Association was Meopham. A thatcher living in the village, who was a member of the Eynsford church, opened his cottage for worship. John Rogers, the Eynsford minister, and others preached there and a number were converted and joined the Eynsford church. In 1832 a church was formed of 44 members from the mother church.

The Home Missions Society helped a number of young churches who did not at this time join the Association, among them Hadlow, Town (now West) Malling and Tunbridge Wells. The work at Tunbridge Wells prospered from the first and in 1834 a church was formed and the site for the Hanover chapel was bought.

By 1834 the Association had existed for 55 years. They were years of notable achievement. The four original members had grown to 29 and more than half of these were new churches. There had been a constant reaching out to the unconverted. Progress had been steady. There was much zeal and much prayer, a lack of self-satisfaction and a lively dependence on God. The churches, with few exceptions, had lived in peace with one another, and one convincing witness to their unity and largeness of heart was the readiness with which churches gave up part of their membership to form the nucleus of new churches. Chatham, Eythorne and Brighthelmstone were notable blood donors. Association meetings were well attended except when the meeting place was at the extreme end of the area, and then most of the churches who were unable to come sent a report of their work. By now most of the churches had Sunday Schools.

Here is a statement of the numerical strength of the member churches, as far as available, at the Association meetings at Gravesend in 1834. The figures given are of members and Sunday School scholars.

	Mem.	*Schol.*		*Mem.*	*Schol.*
Kent			Maidstone	113	200
Ashford	78	80	Margate	78	—
Bessels Green	76	76	Meopham	51	—
Borough Green	106	200	Ramsgate	23	40
Brabourne	27	195	St. Peter's	121	77
Canterbury	72	132	Sandhurst	—	—
Chatham	292	150	Sevenoaks	110	120
Chatham Brook	96	146	Sheerness	140	115
Crayford	68	73	Tenterden	—	—
Deal	34	130	*Sussex*		
Dover	130	155	Battle	52	230
Eynsford	143	170	Brighton	167	200
Eythorne	247	100	Lewes	89	130
Folkestone	73	161	Rye	60	120
Gravesend	60	—	Wadhurst	81	—
Lessness Heath	32	60			

An Association so united, so evangelical, so blessed of God, so firmly established in the trust and affection of its members, appeared certain to go on from strength to strength. But almost suddenly the situation drastically changed.

CHAPTER X

THE WEST KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES 1835 TO 1846

FROM time to time the desirability of dividing the Association into two sections had been discussed. The main argument for division was the difficulty of attending meetings when the meeting place was not near the centre of the area. Main roads were infinitely better than they had been sixty years earlier and coaching facilities were widespread, but travelling was still a slow and expensive business. When the Association met at Brighton only 14 churches were represented, and at Sheerness there were delegates from 11 churches only. But the proposal to divide had always been negatived. In 1834 the churches of Canterbury, Dover, Eythorne, Folkestone and St. Peter's sent letters to the Association urging the expediency of division and once again a majority voted against it. But this time the minority refused to accept the decision. Five churches formed themselves into the East Kent Association of Particular Baptist churches. These churches, Deal, Dover, Folkestone, St. Peter's and Ramsgate, were joined within the next year by Ashford, Canterbury and Eythorne. The old Association responded graciously to the withdrawn churches and expressed the hope that good understanding might continue between the two Associations. Thus in 1835 there were two Associations, the West Kent and Sussex and the East Kent, working separately but in amity, with an interchange of observers at the Association meetings.

We will first trace the story of the West Kent and Sussex Association during the brief eleven years that followed its separation from the Eastern churches.

At its first meeting after the separation, in 1835, the Association welcomed the newly formed churches of Tunbridge Wells and Upnor. The latter was formed of members from the Chatham Brook church. There was no Baptist cause in Tunbridge Wells at this time, for the General Baptist church had died out in 1813. In 1832 a group of Strict Baptists met for worship and two years later formed a church and built Hanover Chapel. They entered the Association in 1835 but withdrew in 1844 to join the New Association of Strict Baptists. Worship is still carried on here by the Strict Baptists. Several other churches were received in the next few years. One of them was at Dane Hill, a Sussex village on the edge of Ashdown Forest. A young man by the name of William Roberts came here in 1810 in search of work. He found a group of believers worshipping in a cottage and soon took a leading place among them. A Particular Baptist church was formed in 1815, mainly of members of the Wivelsfield church, with Roberts as their minister. He was with them for 35 years. The Hastings church joined in 1841. This cause had been started in 1836 with services held in a small room in Waterloo Passage. Through the generous gratitude of a friend whose invalid daughter had benefited from Hastings air, larger premises were hired and eventually a school chapel was built on the site of the present church in Wellington Square. Under the leadership of Philip Saffery the church prospered. In the year before the church joined the Association five of its members sought service in the Mission Field. Foots Cray was another newly formed church. Mr. Colyer, a member of the Eynsford church, moved to Foots Cray and there opened his house for meetings. After two years he secured a paper mill and adapted it for worship and continued to lead the work until his death in 1845. This church is now in the London Association. None of the records of the West Malling church before 1848 has survived, but the origin of the work was probably due to a member of the Borough Green church who moved to West Malling. There he worked a farm and ran a boys' school in a large room adjoining his cottage. On Sundays a group of Baptists met here for worship. In 1819 an Itinerant Ministers' Society placed a Baptist minister there. But the times then were hard in England and the Society had almost no money. The people wanted the minister to stay and the Society appealed to the

Association for aid. Help was given from the limited funds of the H.M. Society and the work was maintained. A church was formed and received into the Association in 1841.

Throughout these days the relationship between the churches appeared peaceable and the attendance at Association meetings was fairly well maintained. It is true that the Association had ceased to be a driving force in the churches. Aggressive evangelism ceased, except in the work of individuals. Very little was attempted or achieved. The Association joined the Baptist Union in 1837, but apart from this there is little to record except a resolution in the previous year protesting "against participation in slavery and slave-holding by ministers, deacons and members of some of the American churches, and also against the exclusion of men from the Lord's table because of colour". The campaign to free all slaves in the British Empire was then gathering force. No new causes were initiated by the Association. The Home Missions Fund was poorly supported and sank into insignificance.

It was in 1841 that the first signs of discord appeared. The minister of the newly formed Upnor church wrote a letter to the Association in which he urged the adoption of certain views on Particular Redemption. This was considered carefully and at the end of the discussion a motion was passed that " this meeting cannot adopt the letter read this morning and that it be rejected". Outwardly the Association was not greatly disturbed by this. In 1843 the Association had 28 member churches and some of them were strong causes. The church at Bond Street, Brighton, returned 307 members and 443 scholars; the Chatham figures were 307 members and 100 children. In the Association there had been 218 baptisms in the year, the members totalled 2,500, the Sunday School scholars 3,142. But beneath the surface there must have been strong currents at work, for when the Association met at Maidstone in 1844, there was unhappy news to report. Seven churches had withdrawn and formed the Kent and Sussex New Association of Strict and Particular Baptists. The main point at issue was whether the Communion Service should be restricted to those who had been baptised as believers (the 'Strict' Baptist view) or open to all believers. Many Strict Baptist churches refused to hold fellowship with churches which practised open communion and the Kent and Sussex churches were not immune

from this dissension. These seven churches were Borough Green, Hadlow, Meopham, Tunbridge Wells, Brighton, Wadhurst and Wivelsfield. Also it was known that there were other churches halting between two opinions whose allegiance was doubtful. The reasons given for seceding were that several of the Association churches had departed from Scriptural truth and that there was a common neglect of Scriptural discipline. The Association's answer was carefully considered and then communicated to the churches and to the Baptist Union. "The statements are without foundation. We are agreed that we feel more deeply than ever the unspeakable importance of the truths which constitute the Gospel, and yield to none in our desire to have that Gospel preached". Concerning Discipline "Our sole desire is to be conformed to the will of Christ . . . .We fully recognise that a difference of opinion on the subject of Communion exists within us; but we consider this no barrier to brotherly co-operation. Charity (or love) and not uniformity of sentiment on all points being, according to the apostle, the uniting and perfect bond".

A similar situation had arisen in East Anglia in 1829, when a group of Strict Baptists left the Suffolk and Norfolk Association to form the Suffolk and Norfolk New Association. This withdrawal from the main stream of Baptist life continued. There were many ministers who held fast to their rigid Calvinism and bitterly opposed the teaching of Fuller. William Gadsby (1773-1844) of Manchester was their outstanding leader. This group formed no Association, for Gadsby distrusted such an organisation, and their main link was the periodical, *The Gospel Standard*, which he began to publish in 1835. Others separated largely on the issue of open or closed Communion. This was the main issue in Kent and Sussex. They too had a periodical, *The Gospel Herald*, first issued in 1829. Twenty-seven of the Strict Baptist churches in London, who felt unable to join the London Baptist Association, formed in 1871 the Metropolitan Association of Strict Baptist churches.

In 1845 the Association met at Battle. The Sevenoaks church had withdrawn, but the Particular Baptist church at Cranbrook was received in. This had been formed in 1780 by a group that left the Independent church. Two years later they converted two cottages into a chapel which is used today by Strict Baptists. For many years it was a small and struggling cause.

In 1846 the Association held its 68th Annual Meetings in Lewes. The attendance was poor and the main business discussed was the future of the Association. This resulted in the following disheartened resolution, "that as the Association has been declining many years more and more in importance and interest, which has become more apparent at this meeting than at any previous meeting, a committee be appointed to take the matter into serious consideration, and to report to the next Annual Assembly, so that measures may be adopted for forthwith rendering it more efficient, or, if this be deemed impracticable, for dissolving it as not sufficiently compensating for the expense and inconvenience which its continuance involves. Great difficulty was found in obtaining a place for next year, till at length the Crayford friends kindly invited us".

The committee consisted of the ministers of the Chatham, Chatham Brook and Maidstone churches, three of the strongest causes in the Association. Evidently they came to the conclusion that the only practicable step was to dissolve the Association, for there is no further entry in the record book. On the face of it this is a surprising decision, for there were 16 churches left in the Association, only three of them having fewer than 50 members. If we possessed more detailed knowledge of factors that led to this result we should understand better why this Association, with all its actual and potential strength, should come to so melancholy an end.

The disbanding of the Association left the 16 churches without a uniting organisation, but in the ensuing years two joined the Strict Baptist Association, and the rest found a home in the East Kent Association. The course of events is somewhat similar to the situation nearly a hundred years earlier when the General Baptist Association, reformed in 1768, received back the churches which had broken away in 1717. This time it is the apparently stronger body which returns to form a new and healthier Kent and Sussex Association.

It is to the East Kent division of the Association we must now turn, but before we do so it will be well to look at the general situation during the early Victorian period, for in many ways the prevalent conditions helped to shape and further the growth of Nonconformity. All the dissenting bodies were rapidly increasing in numbers and influence. In the Registrar General's religious census of 1801 the number of Baptist places

of worship is given as 652; in 1851 the number is 2,789.[15] This census also shows that for every eleven worshippers in the parish churches there were ten in dissenting chapels, a striking witness to the growth of Nonconformity.

The population of Great Britain was increasing rapidly. It grew from 11 million in 1801 to 16½ million in 1831, and the increase was not due to a higher birth rate, for this remained about the same, but to the advance of medical knowledge. It was a period of sharp contrasts between wealth and luxury and grinding poverty. Parliament appeared to be indifferent to the grievous plight of the labouring people. The early years of this century had seen the Tolpuddle martyrs and the Peterloo massacre, the rise of the Chartist movement and the anti-Corn Law League, and the struggle for parliamentary representation. The nonconformists had their own injustices to fight against, but they shared in the struggle against the disabilities of the wage-earning masses. Their influence is made clear by statements made by two men who were Prime Ministers between 1846 and 1866. The first is Lord John Russell. "I know the Dissenters. They carried the Reform Bill; they carried the abolition of slavery; they carried Free Trade; and they'll carry the abolition of Church Rates". The second is from the lips of Lord Palmerston. "In the long run English politics will follow the conscience of the Dissenters".[16]

In this period further educational opportunities opened up for adults and children. The Mechanics' Institutes, begun by Dr. Birkbeck, spread rapidly in the industrial areas and were eagerly attended. In 1827 the London University was founded, a University without religious tests for teacher or taught. The various religious bodies vied with each other in opening Day and Sunday Schools. This educational advance had its effect on the ministers and members of Baptist churches. Better educated congregations needed better educated ministers. The old prejudices against education died hard, but the leaders of the Baptist cause were alive to the situation. The training for the ministry was no longer left to individual effort. Two theological colleges were opened before this century began—Bristol in 1770 and Chilwell, a New Connexion College, in 1797. Others followed, Rawdon (1804), Pontypool (1807), Stepney, now Regent's Park (1810), Haverfordwest (1839), Glasgow and Spurgeon's College (1856), and Manchester (1866). In the

minutes of Kent and Sussex churches there is an increasing number of references to students conducting worship and being invited to pastorates.

A further effect of a larger number of literate members was the increase in the supply of religious literature. The Religious Tract Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society were active and a variety of Baptist periodicals was published, all helping to further religious education and to break down barriers of ignorance and prejudice by bringing information of the work and thought of fellow believers.

The effects of this background will become apparent as we examine the life of the Kent and Sussex Association. There is a liberation of mind, a greater tolerance and an awakened concern for the material as well as the spiritual needs of men.

CHAPTER XI

THE EAST KENT ASSOCIATION OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES 1835 TO 1869

THIS Association formed in 1835 has continued to the present time, though not always under the same name. It began as the East Kent Association. In 1857 the name was changed to the East Kent and Sussex Association as a result of a number of East Sussex churches joining it after they were left stranded by the failure of the West Kent Association in 1846. In 1866 it was changed to the Kent and Sussex Baptist Congregational Association. The name had no reference to any official connection with the Independents but was intended to emphasise the congregational element in Baptist churches. The alteration was prompted by the widespread movement among the Independent churches at this period to call themselves Congregationalist. The following words were used in the Association meeting when the new title was advocated: "The term Baptist by no means adequately describes us. We are Baptists, but more than Baptists; in our polity we are at one with our Paedo-Baptist Congregational brethren. Outsiders gain no glimpse of our church order from our title". But in 1878 the word Congregational was quietly dropped and it became what it has been ever since, the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association.

There are no natural dividing points in its history and we will follow its progress in four fairly equal periods.

The Kent and Sussex Baptist Association 1835-1869

Six churches met at Dover on May 5th, 1835, to consider the refusal of the Kent and Sussex Association to divide into two sections. They resolved "that the Kent and Sussex Association comprises so many churches, and extends over so wide a

space, that the objects of an Association cannot be accomplished with comfort and convenience to the parties concerned and therefore a new Association should be formed". Their letter of explanation to the parent Association includes, "we beg to assure you, dear Brethren, that our conduct in this matter has not resulted from any diminution of affection and regard towards you", and the reply shows a similar spirit of goodwill.

A month later, on June 9th and 10th, the first East Kent Assembly was held. Five churches were present, Deal, Dover, Folkestone, Ramsgate and St. Peter's. From the beginning there is evidence of energy and vision. A Baptist Missionary Society for East Kent and neighbourhood was formed, and its officers and committee appointed. Its annual meeting was to be held at the Association annual meetings. An Association Fund was established to help churches to support a pastor, to open up work in destitute (i.e. pastorless) villages and to meet incidental Association expenses. In the following year the churches of Canterbury, Ashford, Eythorne, and Margate were received in, companied by a gracious letter of commendation from the West Kent Association. A number of resolutions were passed, including one to petition Parliament to abolish Church Rates, and another to protest against members of churches in America participating in slavery and discriminating between men because of their colour.

These resolutions were to become a feature of nearly all the Association meetings. Some were concerned with ecclesiastical matters, especially with petitions to Parliament to abolish the various disabilities under which Dissenters lived. There were frequent resolutions about education, approving early education, protesting against the claim of the Established Church to an exclusive right to educate children, and against the children of Dissenters being compulsorily taught Church of England doctrines. Another group deals with national issues, and some are denominational, recommending to the churches Baptist organisations and Baptist periodicals like the *Baptist Magazine* and *The Freeman* as they became available, or sending a letter of encouragement to William Knibb and the Christians in Jamaica.

Gradually other churches joined. Brabourne was received in 1837, as was the newly formed church at Egerton, established

through the work of the neighbouring church of Smarden. The next church to join was Salem, the new Dover church. Pentside church at Dover was a foundation member of the Association. In 1839 sixteen members of the Pentside church were dismissed at their own request and formed themselves into a church with an open membership. They were an energetic group for they had started a Sunday School, collected £25 for the B.M.S. and built a chapel in Military Road within a year of the formation of the church. A church was formed in Faversham in 1813 and after a somewhat chequered career it seemed to be well established in 1840 with 69 members and 170 children in the Sunday School. The next church to join was Uphill, the old name for Hawkinge. It was an offshoot of the Folkestone church, with open membership. The Association suffered one loss in the withdrawal of the Dover Pentside church, a church which had grown strong in the twenty years of its existence.

When the Association met in 1844 only one church was absent. The original 5 churches had grown to 12, representing 1,028 members, and 1,560 scholars. Baptisms were numerous. There is no reference in the records of this year's meetings to the formation of the Strict Baptist Association which had so sorely weakened the West Kent Association, but its effects became evident at the next meetings when letters were received from Canterbury and Eythorne protesting against some unnamed action of the Ramsgate church which made it impossible for them to have fellowship with them. The Association replied that some churches practised strict communion and others open, and expressed the hope that "the same amount of independency and Christian liberty which every Association church cedes to you, will henceforth be ceded by you to them". But Eythorne, Deal, Egerton, Faversham and St. Peter's resigned or were expunged from the roll because of non-attendance. Three of these churches were among the strongest in the young Association and their defection was a serious setback. Two small churches joined in 1845, Broadstairs and New Romney. The St. Peter's church began work in Broadstairs in 1760 and they had built a meeting house by 1790, but the community which now joins the Association is described in the Association minutes as a new church formed in 1844. A church of 13 members was formed in New Romney in 1831 and had been

carefully nursed by the Association. Regular grants from the Association Fund had helped to sustain a ministry there. The Birchington church joined a little later. The General Baptists opened a work here in 1740 but this had died out. The Particular Baptist work was started here in 1850.

Slowly the Association gained strength. When it met in 1852 there were once again 12 members. Deal had returned to the fold, and Salem, Dover, which had withdrawn for a brief period, was readmitted. It was reported that in each of the three churches, Canterbury, Ramsgate and Uphill, there was a member about to enter the ministry. The net increase in membership was double that of the previous year and gifts to the B.M.S. had risen to £232. An East Kent Home Missionary Society was formed and the expenditure included £52 for the salary of the missionary at New Romney and £10 for the rent of a meeting place at Dymchurch. There was a discussion on the prospects of the Baptist Union. Some Associations and many churches were reluctant to take any step which might diminish their independence, and old differences of opinion persisted. But the East Kent Association had no doubts of the value of the Union. They had experienced its value to their churches in the willing co-operation and aid of the parent Home Missions Society. Their resolution stated "that in the judgement of this Association the Baptist Union has hitherto answered the objects of its formation" . . . "that they can by no means countenance the extinction of that institution, but would rather commend it heartily to the future support of the churches".

Through the next eighteen years steady progress was maintained. St. Peter's rejoined the Association and Deal withdrew. This was in 1855. The church at Uphill dropped out after only ten years in the Association. This church, though established on a Baptist foundation, was an open membership church. The minister who followed John Clarke, the Baptist founder of the church, was not a Baptist and never attended the Association.

In 1857 a group of East Sussex churches was received into the Association. It was resolved that "henceforth the churches at Battle, Edenbridge, Forest Row, Hastings and Lewes be considered members". Three of them had been members of the West Kent Association, but Edenbridge and Forest Row

are new. The former was initiated by a member of the Dormansland church who lived in Edenbridge, and in 1839 opened a schoolroom for services. Two years later the small band of worshippers built a chapel to hold 150, but it was not till 1847 that a church was formed. The work at Forest Row was commenced in 1811. John Burt, a resident, built a chapel for a Sunday School and occasional preaching. Thirty years later, through the help of the Home Missionary Society, the worshippers were able to invite a student from Stepney (now Regent's Park) College to be their pastor and a church was formed.

From this year, 1857, the Sussex churches have been partners in the one Association. Hitherto they had played a very minor part. By 1725 Baptists were strongly represented in Sussex. There were then 45 places of worship registered under the Toleration Act. The majority of these groups were General Baptists and the meeting places were private houses. They were well distributed over the county, Chichester, Ditchling, Horsham and Lewes being the strongest churches. These churches had no part in the earliest Association in the area. This was the 'Kentish' Association. When this 1657 Association resumed activity after the persecution years its membership consisted of "Baptist churches of the General faith in Kent and Sussex". Yet only six Sussex churches joined the Association in the next sixty years, and these were intermittent in their attendance. When the Association was reorganised in 1768 it no longer has a place for Sussex churches. It is an Association of "General Baptist churches in Kent", and remained so from then onwards. Thus the Sussex churches shared with Kent in the life of a General Baptist Association from about 1704 to 1760, but there were never more than 5 churches in membership at any one time.

Their relationship with the Particular Baptists is more continuous. From the formation of the 1779 Association the Sussex churches were included. The connection was broken for a brief period when the West Kent and Sussex Association was dissolved in 1846, but with their return to the East Kent Association in 1857 the two counties were again united and have remained so ever since. The number of churches in membership has never been large and in the 1869 Association meetings only 6 of the 28 member churches were from Sussex. There is no evidence that the Sussex churches have ever had a

County Association, though in June, 1852, six years after the West Kent and Sussex Association had broken up, 5 Sussex churches joined together in Lewes, stating that "It is intended to make our Association as much as possible a Home Missions Society with the view of extending the cause in the towns of the county where dissent scarcely exists". These five churches joined the Kent Association in 1857.

In 1861 another church joined the Association. Five years before a group had hived off from the Strict Baptist church in Richmond Street, Brighton, and formed a church of 32 members, building a chapel in Queen Square. This was one of the predecessors of the Gloucester Place community. Eythorne church was readmitted in 1862. In the next few years a number of churches applied for membership. Some of them were old established churches. Sandhurst and Tenterden were original members of the 1779 Association. There were Baptists meeting in Sandhurst in 1640 but it was not till 1731 that a Particular Baptist church was formed and a chapel built. William Copping was the minister when it joined the 1779 Association. He was a strong and gifted individual and his influence was felt over a considerable area around Sandhurst. He took a prominent part in the life of the Association, being chosen Moderator on four occasions and welcoming the Association to his church a number of times. Chatham too had been a tower of strength to the old Association. She brought 199 members into the present Association. Deal rejoined after 13 years' absence. Sevenoaks church had withdrawn from the West Kent Association in 1845, but she joined no other Association until she returned to the Kent and Sussex Association in 1869. Faversham was welcomed for the second time. She had been admitted in 1841 but was written off six years later as "extinct". The Association made repeated attempts to revive the work and with such success that the church was reformed and had 31 members when she was readmitted in 1868. The other four churches to join were new causes. The work in Goudhurst began in 1861 when J. J. Kendon was sent there as a missionary by the Country Towns' Mission. He had already done much evangelistic work among the hop pickers. He was a gifted and consecrated man, with abounding energy. Within three years he had built up a Christian community in the village and a Baptist church was formed and a chapel erected.

The Home Missions Society had helped for a time, but it was not long before the church stood on its own feet and became a contributor to the Home Missions Fund, as well as opening preaching stations in neighbouring villages. It joined the Association in 1866. Sittingbourne became a member in the next year. This church was formed through the initiative of Mr. G. H. Dean, a Kentish fruit farmer who was already playing an influential part in Association life. It was in his house that the church was formed in 1866. An appeal for money to build a church was signed by C. H. Spurgeon, a name that is to appear again and again in the accounts of the formation of Baptist churches in Kent and Sussex. He sent Mr. A. Makin, one of his students, as the first pastor and the work prospered from the beginning. A Baptist church had been formed in Sheerness in 1812 when services were begun by members of the Chatham church. It was an ultra-Strict Baptist church which survived till 1940 but was not a member of the Association. The present church was begun in 1867 by J. R. Hadler, a student of Spurgeon's College, who started services in hired premises. Within a year the church was formed with 17 members and Mr. Hadler began a ministry there which was to last for 27 years. At Tonbridge a group of Baptists had been worshipping for some time in the Town Hall and in 1868 were strong enough to form a church and invite a minister. Four years later they built their chapel and it is recorded that 31 were baptised at the first baptismal service.

In 1869 the five original churches of the Association had grown to 28, 6 of them from Sussex. It is noteworthy that exactly half of the churches were new causes. They had arisen, as we have seen, in a variety of ways. Some were started by individuals, others by groups of church members. But most were the fruit of the energetic and sacrificial effort of individual churches or of the corporate action of the Home Missions Society. What was happening in Kent and Sussex was paralleled throughout the country. Dr. Payne gives figures in his history of the Baptist Union, pp. 267/268, which indicate that between 1830 and 1870 Baptist churches and church members were more than doubled.

The Association Home Missions Society had increased in effectiveness. Its work had come to be divided into two parts. It helped to maintain a ministry in a few established churches,

raising funds for repairing or building places of worship, as well as making annual grants to supplement stipends. Battle, Faversham, Sheerness and New Romney were some of these places. It also initiated work in places where there was no established cause. With the aid of one of the Colportage Societies and often with the co-operation of the parent Home Missions Society it was able to maintain colporteurs who could bring the Gospel to wide districts by their words and literature. In addition the Association succeeded in welding the churches together in the work of evangelism. The Annual Report was a detailed account of the work, and it was carefully studied at the Association meetings and was printed in full in the annual account of Assembly proceedings. Cases of need were commended to the member churches and opportunities for new work suggested.

Up to 1866 the Home Missions work had been the direct responsibility of all the delegates to the Assembly, but in that year a small and competent committee was put in charge, with the Rev. W. Barker, of Hastings, as secretary. Under this energetic committee the scope of the Home Missions work was enlarged and an increasing number of churches were encouraged to evangelise. In 1869 Mr. Barker could report that the churches had established preaching stations or Ragged Schools in 24 villages. The Eythorne church, which at one time had 12 mission stations, was maintaining a ministry in several villages, and even young churches like Goudhurst, Sittingbourne and Sheerness were branching out. Some churches were helping causes many miles away. For several years the Canterbury church supplied preachers for New Romney in spite of the fact that the village was then at least seven miles from the nearest railway station.

Two changes had been made in the Assembly programme. The place originally given to the Annual meeting of the B.M.S. is now given to the Annual meeting of the Home Missions Society, partly because of the importance of this work, but principally because the Foreign Missionary interests were being fostered on a district basis and visits were made to the churches by missionaries on furlough and other missionary speakers. The other change is that the welcoming church and not the local inn now supplied the needed hospitality. This was inevitable as the number of delegates increased. In addition, a

break was made with tradition in 1865 when Mr. J. B. Flint, of Margate, the treasurer of the Association, was the first layman to be appointed Moderator.

The Association was still strictly a male preserve. The current attitude to women in church life was illustrated at Deal in 1839. The Baptists had been joining in united prayer meetings with the Methodists but discontinued this because "a female was called upon to engage in prayer, which is contrary to Scripture rule and order". The subject of the Association letter in 1865 was, "Female agency in connection with our churches". The Rev. J. Wilkins, minister of the church in Queen Square, Brighton, makes it plain "that we shall not be guilty of encouraging female preaching, for we regard 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit' so indispensable to the Christian female that, in the true Pauline spirit, we 'suffer not a woman to teach, but to be in silence' ". He graciously allowed that it was permissible for them to teach children, collect funds, visit the sick and needy, and "keep a watchful eye on the young females". The habit of giving ministers the title of 'Reverend' is becoming common usage. Robert Robinson, who wrote *Principles of Nonconformity* in 1778, wondered that any man could be so silly as to call himself reverend, and Abraham Booth deemed it "a species of profaneness to be so denominated". Its use in the Association records at this time partly depends on the scribe. In some years the recorder of the Association minutes uses the old terms of brother or minister, while the writer of the Home Missions Report in the same year refers to every minister by the title of reverend.

The shape of the programme of the Association meetings had changed little since 1779, and the services in the local churches were almost unaltered. Halford L. Mills, who spent much time in putting in order and transcribing the records of the Smarden church, of which he was a member for 63 years, has given a vivid account of the worshippers and the worship in this Kentish church on a winter Sunday about 1850. The roads were deep in mud, and the turnpike road did not pass the chapel, neither did the causeway, or raised pavement, from the village to the Parish Church which is laid in most of the villages in the Kent Weald to comply with the law. The worshippers who lived near enough to walk wore clogs or hobnail boots, carrying a clean pair of shoes round their necks

into which they changed in the vestry. Those at a distance walked or came on horse-back, the wife riding pillion, or in farm carts. There was ample stabling provided. Most brought their dinner to eat in the vestry, for Smarden had not yet altered the afternoon service to the evening as some of the town churches had done. Hence the country saying: "You can tell a churchman by his prayer book; the dissenter by his dinner basket".

The order of service was hymn, long prayer, hymn, sermon, prayer and benediction and it lasted usually one and a half hours. All on the floor of the chapel sat to sing the hymns, and these were given out two lines at a time by a deacon because not all could read. The men stood during prayers. At the last hymn the congregation stood, turning their backs on the pulpit and facing the singing gallery. This was full of women singers and men with fiddles, flutes and double bass. The men singers sat with the congregation. There were no notices and collections were taken once a quarter.

The Association often examined the effectiveness of its organisation. The business session in 1858 was devoted to this and the circular letter which followed was concerned with possible ways of increasing its value to the churches. In these thirty-five years it had achieved an influential position in the churches. It was well served by its secretaries. John M. Cramp guided its counsels for the first seven years. He was the son of the veteran minister of the St. Peter's church and he too became a minister. He was trained at Stepney Academy, now Regent's Park College, completing his course in 1817. He achieved considerable academic success and took a leading part in the life of the Association and the Baptist Union. In 1838 he was elected Chairman of the Baptist Union (the holder of this office was not then called President). He continued as Secretary of the Association until 1842. He had been since 1827 assisting his father at St. Peter's but he now accepted a call to the Wellington Square church, Hastings. But after only two years he accepted the Presidency of the Baptist College in Montreal. He was a prolific writer. His well-known Baptist History was published in 1871. He was succeeded as Association secretary by D. Jones, the minister of the Folkestone church, who held this office for nearly 10 years. The Association had shown an awareness of the needs to be met and a

readiness to adapt its organisation to seize the opportunities which offered. It had stimulated interest in the work of the B.M.S. while co-ordinating evangelism at home. The membership of its churches had risen to 1,396 and there were 4,033 children in its Sunday Schools. But "lest we should be exalted above measure" there are two facts to be noted. Three-quarters of the Baptist churches in Kent and Sussex were not in the Association. There were 31 churches in Sussex and only 6 in the Association. In Kent, apart from Metropolitan Kent, there were 75 churches and only 22 in the Association. Some of those who were outside the Association were General Baptists but most were Strict Baptists, who now had no Association life because the break-away Association of 1844 was shortlived. The second fact is that though the Independents had fewer churches in the two counties their Sussex Home Mission in 1870 employed 11 evangelists, conducted services in 47 places of worship, and expended nearly £1,200. The Kent and Sussex Association had no occasion for complacency.

The following list of churches and the numbers of their members and scholars is taken from the 1869 Association report.

Association Statistics, 1869

	Mem.	*Schol.*		*Mem.*	*Schol.*
Ashford	52	51	Faversham	30	—
Birchington	26	90	Goudhurst	38	160
Battle	75	134	Hastings	115	165
Brabourne	92	80	Lewes	111	118
Brighton	213	210	Margate	147	275
Canterbury	189	200	Ramsgate	159	535
Chatham	206	600	St. Peter's	72	60
Dover	102	—	Sandhurst	95	134
Deal	57	120	Sittingbourne	134	130
Dymchurch	—	—	Sheerness	30	76
Edenbridge	84	147	Sevenoaks	57	95
Eythorne	232	110	Tenterden	61	227
Folkestone	127	157	Tonbridge	19	24
Forest Row	13	45	Newhaven	20	80

CHAPTER XII

THE KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION 1870 TO 1899

THE Association passed uneventfully from 1869 to 1870 in good heart. Its strength had been steadily reinforced by the addition of churches old and new. Many of the churches which were members of the disbanded West Kent Association had joined its ranks.

The outstanding feature of the Association's achievements during the next thirty years is the continued and increasing vigour of its evangelism. This was partly due to the work of the Association Home Missions Society, under the enthusiastic leadership of the Rev. W. Barker, minister of the Hastings Church. Apart from the work achieved directly by this organisation it kept the subject of evangelism constantly before the churches. The churches were far from leaving everything to one of their organisations. Their spirit was that of the American pioneers who at this very time were pressing further and further into new and uncultivated territory. It seems to have been one of the leading convictions of most of the ministers and members that their major task was to win souls for Christ. This was taught to young converts as a truth so obvious that it needed no proof, with the result that much village and open-air preaching was done by bands of young people from the Bible classes and the newly formed Christian Endeavour Societies. When a new church was formed it almost invariably looked round for opportunities of bringing the Gospel to the neighbourhood. In truth, some of the young churches put to shame the lethargic attitude of a few of the older and larger churches. To gather together some of the ventures made in this period provides an impressive list. Goudhurst, under the vigorous lead of Mr. J. J. Kendon, was indefatigable, establishing four mission stations, employing a colporteur, and in the hop picking season

bringing down as many as ten missionaries to serve the district. Dover, Salem, carried on work in four villages with the aid of her eight local preachers. One of her missions was at St. Margaret's, the largest village near Dover. As soon as the Tonbridge church was formed it began work at Hildenborough. Eythorne maintained her wonderful reputation, carrying on work in six and sometimes more centres, building chapels for some of them and doing this entirely out of her own resources. Sittingbourne was soon working in two villages and employing a colporteur in spite of heavy building commitments. Tunbridge Wells began work at Frant, Chatham at Blue Bell Hill, Halling and Borstal, Sheerness at Halfway House, Ashford at Willesborough, Tenterden at Biddenden, Maidstone at Cox Heath and Leeds, Edenbridge at Marlpit Hill, Sevenoaks at Seal and Kemsing, Hastings at Halton and St. Leonards, Canterbury at Tyler Hill, Shoreham at Small Dole and Arundel, Loose at Boughton Monchelsea, Herne Bay at Beltinge, Orpington at Green St. Green, Worthing at Bognor, with an eye on Littlehampton, Crawley at Horsham, Rochester at Stroud, and the three Brighton churches, Sussex St., Queen Square and Holland Road, were the moving spirits which led to the founding of Florence Road. Many of the mission stations became independent churches. Some of them were supported in their early years by the mother church, aided sometimes by Association grants. Others were carried through the difficult years by the generous gifts of individuals. In 1897 32 churches were working at 50 stations, with 137 local preachers.

In 1886 the Baptist Union decided to celebrate the fifty years of Queen Victoria's reign by raising a Jubilee Fund for Irish and Home Missions. Half of the money raised by an Association was to be retained for its own work and the rest to be used by the parent Society to further pioneer evangelising. The Churches of the Association responded well, and the Fund not only gave the Association a larger income but led to fruitful co-operation with headquarters.

The number of colporteurs was increased. Among the centres from which they worked were Cowfold, Biddenden, St. Margaret's, Arundel, Sittingbourne, Canterbury, Bramber and Frant. Older readers will remember these devoted men trudging, and then cycling, with their heavy packs from village to village in all weathers, often rebuffed but never ceasing to

CRAWLEY
Built 1954

FINDON VALLEY
Built 1958

Folkestone (Hill Road)
Built 1959

Gillingham (Twydall)
Built 1959

bear witness to their Lord. In time they found a warm welcome and a high regard in hundreds of homes in their districts.

With a more than doubled income the Association was able to take the responsibility for more mission stations. Brasted, a village between Sevenoaks and Westerham, was one of these. A Sunday School and a Band of Hope were started and in 1877 a Mission Hall was built and a church formed, led by Mr. Burnett, a man of energy and vision. He enlisted the interest of the Association and for the next twenty years an annual grant was made to the church. In 1889 the membership was 85, the children had trebled, and local preachers were maintaining work in four mission stations. Mr. Burnett was able to lead this live community for twenty years before ill health compelled him to retire.

It was Dr. S. H. Booth, the secretary of the Baptist Union, who suggested that a Baptist cause might be started in Hawkhurst. There was a Particular Baptist cause here in 1700, but this had long since died and now certain members of the Sandhurst church who lived in Hawkhurst were eager to revive the work. Dr. Booth and the Association Committee agreed to begin work, sharing the cost for the first year. Two years later in 1889 a church was formed, an iron hall rented, and two Regent's Park College students took it in turns to conduct the worship. In two years it became self-supporting and invited S. J. Henman, one of the students, to the pastorate. In 1894 the membership had risen to 45, and there were 98 Sunday School scholars. The church reported that "most of the members were total abstainers and all of them non-smokers". This was the last venture in which the Rev. W. Barker shared. Failing health compelled him to relinquish his work as secretary. Through twenty-four years this warm-hearted and well loved man had maintained the flame of evangelism in the Association. He himself was an effective evangelist and the unfailing friend of small and needy churches. Through all the years he received the encouragement and support of his own church at Wellington Square, Hastings.

It was not only through mission stations and colporteurs that the work of evangelism was carried on. The written word was extensively used. Many thousands of tracts, magazines (often with the local church's news inset) and copies of Spurgeon's sermons were widely distributed. Nearly all churches

carried on work in the open-air. Evangelical missions came to the fore in this period. Most of the Association churches held them for periods varying from a week to a month. For the most part the evangelists were ministers of the district, some of whom had special gifts for this work. The Rev. W. Pettman of Herne Bay and the Rev. E. Roberts of Ashford frequently worked together and were greatly used of God. Some of the missioners came from outside and the names of W. Y. Fullerton, W. R. Lane and William Olney become familiar to the reader of the Association records. Almost without exception the churches report conversions and baptisms as a result of this work. In 1885 the Sittingbourne minister baptised 82 as a result of a fortnight's meetings, and the Dover church was able to increase its membership with 68 new converts. It was at this period that the Christian Endeavour Movement made its appearance in Kent and Sussex. It spread rapidly and at the end of the century there were few churches without a Society. It proved an effective way of training young Christians for Christian service, helping them to pray and speak in the presence of others. Many, if not most, of the open-air speakers, local preachers and candidates for the ministry at home or abroad were the product of the C. E. meeting.

This picture of sustained evangelism carried on year after year is an impressive one, the more so when it is remembered that a similar purpose and spirit was evident throughout the land in all the nonconforming bodies. It had a twofold effect on the Association, both welding the churches together in a common purpose and increasing the number of member churches. In 1899 there were 60 churches in the Association, more than doubling the membership of thirty years before. There had been some casualties in those years, some churches resigning and a few ceasing to exist, but 43 churches joined, nearly all of them new causes.

Eynsford was one of the old established churches to join. This church had wielded wide influence. John Rogers built up a strong community in the thirty-eight years of his ministry from 1802-1840 and that strength was long maintained. Jonathan Whittlemore was minister here for eight years. He was the originator of the *Christian World*, the *Sunday School Times*, *The Baptist Messenger* and other periodicals. The first number of the *Christian World* was published in 1857 during his

pastorate. Eynsford had been a persistent missionary church, originating a number of churches in the district, but when it joined the Association in 1872 it had only 48 members. Smarden was received into the Association in 1892, but it was then passing through a most difficult period and was unable to take much part in Association life. Maidstone was brought into the Association by the Rev. George Walker soon after he began his forty years' ministry in 1875. The original Particular Baptist church in Maidstone was the church then worshipping in King Street, which was formed in 1797 by eight members of the Chatham church. This church gradually moved away from the Particular Baptist tradition and there were a number of secessions. One in 1820 led to the formation of Providence, in Mote Road, a Strict Baptist church which is in fellowship with the Association. A second secession in 1831, when the King Street church adopted open membership, resulted in the formation of Zion church. This cause received its death blow two years later when its minister and 73 members withdrew and formed a new church which worshipped in Bethel chapel, Union Street, and is the forerunner of the present Knightrider Street church. Four other churches, Tunbridge Wells, Foots Cray, West Malling and Gravesend, which had been members of the West Kent Association, were welcomed. The new church in Tunbridge Wells was formed in 1874 by a small group of men who seceded from the Strict Baptists of Hanover Chapel to form an open communion church, "after the faith of the Metropolitan Tabernacle". The Association approved this step and Mr. Spurgeon helped by sending his students to conduct the services. The church grew steadily in spite of inadequate premises. Ten years after the church was formed the Tabernacle in Calverley Road was opened and the original 21 members had grown to 239. Foots Cray was founded by one of the members of the Eynsford church who moved there in 1811. It joined the Association in 1883, with 127 members and 200 children. It is now in the London Baptist Association. West Malling had only been a member of the West Kent Association for five years when the Association collapsed. It had maintained a vigorous life, enlarging its chapel and building Sunday School premises, and giving generously to home and foreign missions. Many non-Baptists attended and served the church and in 1886 it was turned into a Union church, in

membership with the Baptist Union and supporting the Baptist Missionary Society. The Gravesend church was formed in 1827. There was a considerable secession of members in 1844 who founded a Strict Baptist church, but the church recovered and in 1885 brought over 100 members into the Association.

The rest of the churches received into the Association were new causes. They came into being in a variety of ways, some through Baptists who came to live in a place where there was no Baptist church, others through the work of an individual church or of the Home Missions Society. But the greatest moving force in founding churches in Kent and Sussex at this period was C. H. Spurgeon, himself the prince of evangelists. He founded Spurgeon's College in 1856 and between then and his death in 1892 he trained nearly 900 men for the ministry. Moreover he had the gift of imparting to others his passion for saving souls. He inspired the officers and members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle with the same spirit. Among them were men of considerable wealth who gladly placed funds for extension work in their pastor's hands. By means of his students and the generosity of the members of his church Mr. Spurgeon was able to respond effectively when openings arose for new causes. The fruit of this we shall see as we look at the new churches coming into the Association.

Eleven of these were in Sussex, including three in Brighton. Holland Road, Hove, became a member in 1891. Another church in Hove had been received into the Association in 1881 together with its minister, but after 1883 neither minister nor other delegate attended and no report was sent. In 1890 its name was dropped from the list. The Holland Road church was formed in 1887 with 42 members. In the same year the church building, the gift of Mr. G. T. Congreve, was opened and the Rev. David Davies began a fruitful ministry which was to last for twenty years. He was trained at Bristol Baptist College and came to Hove at the height of his powers after ministries in Cardiff, Weston-super-Mare and Regent's Park. It was during his ministry that the Stoneham Hall cause was founded. Sussex Street church, Brighton, joined in 1893. This was an offshoot from the original Particular Baptist church, Salem, in Bond Street. George Isaacs, after eight years as minister of that church, met with difficulties and resigned. With the help of his followers he built a chapel in Sussex Street

and formed a church to which he ministered from 1862 to 1871. It prospered right up to the time when it united with Queen Square to form the nucleus of the Gloucester Place church. Three years later, in 1895, Florence Road, with its 49 members, was received into the Association. The Holland Road and Queen Square churches had been raising a fund so that a Baptist cause could be started in the Preston Park area of Brighton. A small school chapel was built on the site where the present church stands and a church of 11 members was formed under the care of the Rev. David J. Llewellyn. He had the Welshman's gift of imaginative and compelling speech and during his eighteen years' ministry he built up a strong community.

Five other churches were established in coastal areas. In 1870 Mr. Spurgeon sent to Eastbourne one of his students, G. H. Sandwell, to see if a Baptist church could be formed there. Services were held in a series of hired halls, and in 1871 a church of 12 members was formed, an iron building was erected in Ceylon Place, Mr. Sandwell was invited to the pastorate and the church joined the Association. In the same year the Shoreham (Sussex) church, under the Rev. J. W. Harrald, joined the Association. The church was formed in 1869 and was another of the causes in which Mr. Spurgeon was interested. Among other generous acts he sent to the south of France for some specially narrow chairs to seat the overcrowded congregation. This church soon began to undertake mission work and it reported in 1882 that "we have built a chapel at Small Dole for £300, and we propose to employ a Christian man to visit the district and preach at Small Dole". They ask the Association to supplement the £30 which the church could raise for this purpose. The story of the Worthing church is similar to that of Eastbourne. In 1878 Mr. Spurgeon sent there F. Stead, one of his students, paying his expenses for six months. His work met with success and a church was formed in 1879 of which he was invited to become the pastor. It joined the Association in the same year. Two years after this they built a school hall in Christchurch Road, which was replaced by the present church in 1885, by which time the membership had risen to 70 and there were 200 children in the Sunday School. From its beginning this church showed an enthusiasm for Home Missionary Work. In its first twenty

years it took over from Shoreham the responsibility for the work at Small Dole, accepted the oversight of the Arundel cause and began work at Angmering and West Tarring. This interest has been steadily maintained by the church and its successive ministers up to the present time and later pages will reveal how fruitful this has proved in founding new Baptist churches in West Sussex.

The St. Leonard's church was welcomed into the Association in 1881. The Hastings friends had been interested for some time in establishing a Baptist cause there and in 1880 a church was formed with 15 members, nearly all from Wellington Square. In the next year they built their place of worship. The cost of this was over £4,000, a heavy burden on the shoulders of a young church even with help from the Association and the Baptist Union. In the first ten years progress was slow, but by the end of the century the membership had risen to nearly 200. Portslade entered the Association in 1882. Mr. Spurgeon had been told of the spiritual needs of this district and had sent down one of his students, E. A. Tydeman, to search out the possibilities. The room he hired was soon crowded out but it was three years before they were able to build a school chapel. The church passed through a difficult period of dissension, but by 1892 they had regained lost ground and were strong enough to build a larger place of worship, with a Sunday School and a caretaker's cottage.

Three Sussex churches remain, Crawley, Burgess Hill and Forest Row. In 1883 sixty people in Crawley formed a church and invited James McAuslane to be their minister. He was one of Mr. Spurgeon's students who had been working there. It was an open membership church. It flourished from the beginning under the vivid personality of its minister. Three times in the next fifteen years it became necessary to enlarge its premises. The membership was never very high for the population of Crawley was limited, but the church played a lively part in the community and in the district. McAuslane was a gifted speaker, not least effective in the open-air work into which he led his people. He was always ready to defend, and to defend cogently, the faith that was in him, and the breadth of his interests appealed to many who were not normally interested in church work. The Forest Row church joined the Association for the second time in 1886. The

church was formed in 1841 and for several years was served by students from Spurgeon's College. Among them were Frank Thompson, W. L. Mackenzie, H. R. Cripps and G. W. Harte. F. W. Boreham preached there in his student days. It joined the Association in 1857 but its membership had lapsed by 1880. For many years it received help from the Association's Home Missions Fund. The third church is Burgess Hill. In 1873 a local farmer and insurance agent, Ephraim Standing, bought the local Commercial School to use for preaching and Sunday School work. Seven of the worshippers here were baptised at the Queen Square church in Brighton, and they formed themselves into a church with Standing as their pastor. He took no salary and the expenses were met by placing a box at the door of the meeting place. The church grew and gradually moved away from the Strict Baptist position, becoming more evangelical. It joined the Association in 1894, and in the following year it reported that a new Sunday School had been opened, the congregations had doubled and over a hundred sittings had been taken.

When we turn to Kent we find that here too a number of new causes were founded in or near seaside towns. They are dotted round the coast from the mouth of the Medway to Dover. The Rochester church was founded by G. A. Miller, another of Spurgeon's students. He had come to Strood in 1886 as student pastor to a group of Christians worshipping in the Institute. He had been deeply impressed by Mr. Spurgeon's challenge to his men to begin ministerial work in a place where there was no Baptist church, and he moved across the river to the Cathedral city and began open-air preaching in this stronghold of Anglicanism. He was alone, with no local group to welcome and support him, but with an unquenchable faith in God and in the truth and power of the Gospel. His evangelistic methods were by no means stereotyped. Talking with policemen on point duty at Rochester bridge he discovered that none of them could swim and would be helpless if anyone got into difficulties in the river. So he met groups of the City Police under the bridge in their off-duty hours and taught them to swim. He taught them more than swimming. Within a year he had gathered a group of converts and was holding regular services. In 1888 a church of 20 members was formed, and he was ordained and became their minister. For thirty-

eight years this sturdily built man ministered in this city, bringing to his task integrity, conviction and plainness of speech with a kindliness and understanding which won the esteem and indeed the affection of many far outside the circle of his own church.

Not far from Rochester, New Brompton, the part of the area North and North East of Chatham which is now called Gillingham, was developing rapidly. Members of Clover Street, Chatham, who lived in New Brompton, approached Mr. Spurgeon, who offered to supply a ministry there at his own expense. The Workman's Hall, High Street, was hired, and services held there by W. W. Blocksidge and a fellow student. In 1879, a year after the work was started, a church was formed. The need for a minister became urgent and Mr. Spurgeon again gave generous help which, with grants from the Association, made it possible to invite W. W. Blocksidge to the pastorate in 1881. From the beginning the cause flourished, growing rapidly and reaching out into the neighbourhood. In nine years there were 253 members and 412 children in the Sunday School. Mr. Blocksidge served this church for forty-four years, and in that time not only sustained a vigorous church but took an active and effective part in the life of the Association and the churches of Kent.

The Whitstable church began through Mr. Davis, of Broadstairs, coming to the town. He rented a chapel on Middle Wall which had been vacated by the Wesleyans and started services there. The results were disappointing at first, but Spurgeon's College helped with preaching supplies and a mission held by Mr. William Olney gave a needed impetus to the work so that it became possible in 1870 to form a church of 20 members. The Herne Bay church arose through a group of Baptists holding cottage meetings there in 1873. A site for a chapel and £100 towards the building of it was given, to which Mr. Spurgeon added another £100 and agreed to send students to lead the worship. This continued for three years, when Wallace Pettman, one of the students, was invited to take the services regularly. The next year he settled in the town. A church of 16 members was formed in 1879 and a chapel was built. In the next year the church joined the Association and the Baptist Union. Under the energetic ministry of Mr. Pettman the church grew steadily, its members reached nearly 100 in the next ten years.

Churches were formed in three places in the North East of Thanet. The work at Reading Street, a hamlet a mile or so North of St. Peter's, was initiated by members of this church. In 1871 a church was formed and a quiet ministry was carried on, with little fluctuations of strength, until the end of the century. Two Broadstairs churches joined the Association in this period. The first church, which was formed in 1844, had already been in membership with the Association from 1845 to 1860. Now in 1874 it was again admitted but dropped out of Association life in 1890. The second church, which joined the Association in 1897, was one of the Home Mission churches nurtured largely by Cavendish, Ramsgate. In 1896 and 1897 the members of Cavendish were holding prayer meetings in Broadstairs for the success of the work and their minister, the Rev. Thomas Hancocks, held a mission there. A number of candidates were baptised and a church was formed with 15 members.

Two new Ramsgate churches were received, Ellington in 1878 and St. George's the year after. The story of these churches is somewhat involved. They both sprang from Cavendish, which had been a member of the Association since its formation. In 1874 it opened its communion table to other than Baptists and about 30 members seceded and, with a few Congregationalists, formed the Ellington Union Church. In that same year the Rev. J. D. Rodway began his ministry at Cavendish, but trouble arose, and in 1878 there was a second secession who formed another church worshipping in St. George's Hall. They invited Robert Wood, from Spurgeon's College, to be their pastor. After four years Rodway had an accident which compelled his resignation, but before he left he suggested to his Cavendish church that they should join forces with the St. George's cause, with Robert Wood as the minister of the united church. This they did and the St. George's church drops out of the Association after existing less than five years. Robert Wood must have been a gifted and godly man. Under his ministry the membership of the Cavendish church almost trebled in the ten years of his pastorate. When he announced to the church that he was leaving, he told the church, that " Here in this church I have spent hours on my knees for you. I have come down to Cavendish late, unlocked the door, and let myself in to spend the night alone with God. I have gone

from seat to seat—where you sit Sunday by Sunday, and in your accustomed seat I have knelt down and prayed for you."

Two churches were received in from Dover in 1878. One was the well-established Salem church. It had withdrawn from the Association a second time in 1872. There had been serious dissensions among the members and the membership dropped in one year from 206 to 102. Congregations were very small and the Sunday School almost extinct. But slowly the situation improved. Former members returned and a new era opened when the Rev. E. J. Edwards began in 1877 a ministry which was to last for twenty-five years. The church had always been strongly missionary and in the year she rejoined the Association she was responsible for three mission stations and partly responsible for three others. Four of its members served in the foreign field. G. W. Stokes and his wife went to China in 1891 to work for the China Inland Mission and were both martyred in the 1900 Boxer risings. Miss Mary Macdonald became a missionary in India in 1894, working with Pandita Ramabai, and in the same year J. E. Woodcock died at Matadi soon after he arrived in Congo. By 1889 the church had recovered more ground than they had lost. The membership was 364, with 509 children in the Sunday School.

The other Dover church, The Tabernacle, first appears in the Association records in 1878. It is described as "essentially a Home Mission work", and "four local brethren were co-operating with the pastor, the Rev. J. Frewin". Its membership then was 131, so it must have been in existence for some years. The church flourished while Mr. Frewin was there, though crippled with a debt on the Tabernacle building, but when he left the work collapsed, and it was disbanded at the end of the century.

In addition to these coastal churches, eight inland churches were founded. They were Loose, Yalding, Orpington, Shoreham, Pembury, Halling, St. John's at Tunbridge Wells, and Crockenhill.

Loose was admitted to the Association in 1881, a young cause with 19 members. It maintained a steady work, doubling its membership and Sunday School in four years. It then built a new chapel and school premises and started mission work at Boughton Monchelsea. In Yalding there had been a small cause of General Baptists as early as 1772, for the

General Baptist Association was then arranging to supply them with preachers. From then until 1825 it was included in the lists of member churches, but rarely sent a report or a representative. It was always a small and struggling community. In 1886 the Particular Baptist Association came to the aid of a group who were meeting in a small mission room in the village. It proved possible with the aid of the Baptist Union to place an evangelist here and the work went well. In five years a small chapel was built. The church appears in the Association list in 1892 and its membership is given as 64. For many years the Association supported the work with annual grants. There was a Baptist group in Orpington in the seventeenth century, members of the General Baptist church which worshipped at Bradburn, Sevenoaks, and later established itself at Bessels Green. The present church arose from what was probably an Independent church in Orpington which had Baptists among its worshippers. These formed a Strict Baptist church in 1848, adapting some cottages for worship. They were ministered to in the next thirty years by two ministers and a series of local preachers, one of whom used to walk down from London and back again on the Sunday. Then the church invited Edwin White to be its pastor, a working man who was studying at Spurgeon's College five days a week. The church prospered under his ministry, a chapel was built and school premises added. It became a member of the Association in 1885, when the membership stood at 62, with 165 children in the school. From then on the church made rapid progress. It was soon branching out into the neighbourhood, establishing missions at Fordcroft and Green St. Green. Foreign missions profited from its generosity, and it gave its members as well as its money. In 1890 one member was studying for the foreign field and another for the home ministry.

Pembury Church has an interesting history. For over forty years a group of believers worshipped in the house of Stephen Dickinson. As he and the brother who helped him grew older they sought to give the work a more permanent home and in 1834 they built a small wooden chapel, with a room for a Sunday School. After the death of the brothers the work was carried on by Mr. and Mrs. Betts, who started a British School which lasted until the introduction of a Board School in

1876. A baptistry was built in 1882, and the first baptismal service was conducted by a nephew of Mrs. Betts, the Rev. F. B. Meyer, three of whose sisters were in membership here. The church had been an Independent church, but was formed into a Union church of Baptists and Congregationalists in 1885. It had 89 members and 195 scholars when it joined the Association in 1897. Halling, a church with 28 members and 200 children, joined a year later. This church was the fruit of the labours of the Chatham church and was already well established in this Medway town of 3,000 people. The Free Church in St. John's Road, Tunbridge Wells, came into the Association in 1898. Its membership was then 60, but under the Rev. J. Mountain's gifted ministry this number doubled in the next six years. The Shoreham (Kent) church resulted from cottage meetings held there by the Eynsford minister. Through the help of a deacon of the Metropolitan Tabernacle and others it was possible in 1875 to buy the chapel belonging to the Bible Christians and conduct it as a "Baptist Mission" connected with the Eynsford church. It carried on quietly for twenty years and then Mr. Benjamin Greenwood undertook the oversight of the work, a responsibility he shouldered for forty years. It became independent in 1896 and three years later joined the Association. Crockenhill joined in 1899. It had a considerable history behind it for a Baptist cause was started there in 1798, and in 1801 a blacksmith's forge was rented and fitted out as a chapel. An open communion church was formed and a Captain Rogers began a ministry which lasted more than thirty years. The church was re-formed in 1861 with 23 members. For many years the services were maintained by local preachers, but in 1888 the church invited a pastor, the Rev. J. H. Marshall, who served them for thirty years.

The cost of providing premises for the new causes was considerable. When the Association met in 1893 the secretary reported that in the past twenty years £87,000 had been spent on building the twenty-nine new places of worship and a further £25,000 on Sunday Schools and enlargements of existing premises. It is a witness to the generosity of the Kent and Sussex Baptists that by then £102,000 of that amount had been given. In 1880 a "Chapel Building and Enlargement Fund" was formed and every church was expected to give an annual collection to it. It was hoped to give £100 each year to

the church chosen by the Association, and thanks partly to the generosity of the treasurer, Mr. G. H. Dean, this proved possible. Most of the new churches received this sum, as well as annual grants from the Home Missions Fund, in the early years of their existence.

The resolutions passed at the annual Assemblies were numerous and varied. There were objections to paying for Church schools out of the rates, and protests at the Romanising of the Anglican Church. They protested also against the wars in Zululand and Afghanistan, the opium traffic and the Armenian massacres, and regretted that the Prince of Wales should countenance and join in betting. They sent a loyal address to the Queen on the Diamond Jubilee of her coming to the throne, and approved of Plimsoll's Bill to promote the safety of sailors, Home Rule for Ireland and the disestablishment of the Establishment. There was no nonsense then about keeping politics out of religion. The delegates appeared to be Liberals almost to a man. They rejoiced when W. E. Gladstone was returned to power in 1880 with a large majority, and lamented five years later when the Government was defeated, and in a message to Gladstone they "viewed with consternation the surrender of the affairs of the country to Lord Salisbury, which would be a national calamity". There were several motions on the drink traffic, urging the Government to close the public houses on Sunday and to forbid the sale of liquor to any child under the age of sixteen. They express warm approval of the growth of Bands of Hope. This was a fairly recent change of attitude. Forty years before this two brothers of the Dover church lodged a complaint because a lecture was allowed on church premises under the auspices of "The Society for the suppression of intemperance", and in 1837, at the celebration of the ministerial Jubilee of the Rev. T. Cramp of St. Peter's, "the Sunday School children were regaled with beer and buns".

Foreign Missions have their place. They protest against the police attempt to stop open-air preaching by Protestant missionaries in Calcutta, and against the persecution of the Stundists by the Russian authorities; they express sympathy in 1884 and 1885 with the B.M.S. and the families affected by the death of several Congo missionaries; they pledge their support in raising the B.M.S. Centenary Fund of £100,000 and approve the aim of the Society to raise its annual income to this figure.

There are several resolutions concerning their relation to the Baptist Union. They join in supporting the Augmentation and Annuity Funds and are deeply interested in the progress being made towards a wider union. In 1889 they passed a resolution that "this Association, convinced of the reality of the unity already existing between the two sections of the Baptist Denomination, rejoices in the effort now being made to draw these two sections nearer together, and records its earnest desire for complete success", and a little later "rejoices in the prospect of the complete amalgamation of the Particular and General Baptists". This question of their joining the Baptist Union had long been discussed by the General Baptists of the New Connexion and when the motion to amalgamate was put before the New Connexion Association on June 25th, 1891, it was carried by a majority of four to one. The two Foreign Missionary Societies and the two Building Funds were fused and the General Baptists were received into Particular Baptist Associations. It was not a complete union of Baptists for the Strict Baptists continued to stand aloof. The achievement of this measure of union called forth thanksgiving from the Kent and Sussex Association.

Much of the time of the business sessions was taken up with the Association's own life and work. One question not infrequently raised was how to increase fellowship among churches in an Association which covered two counties. The idea of dividing into two had never met with acceptance, and eventually in 1894 the Association decided to establish four districts, Sussex, Tonbridge, Maidstone and Canterbury, which should meet in the spring and autumn, each district to choose two laymen and a minister to serve on the Association committee.

In 1891 it was decided to drop the annual Circular Letter. This had been a feature of the annual reports of Association life in Kent and Sussex for at least 200 years. No reason for this decision is recorded.

In 1887 Personal Membership was introduced. "Any Christian man who is a Baptist, if recommended by his church meeting, and paying one guinea a year, may be a personal member of the Association, and is entitled to take part in the transactions of Association business." (N.B. 'man').

In 1883 the phrase in the Association's Rule 4 which defines the delegates to the Association as "messengers chosen by their

churches", was altered to "ministers and *male* members of the churches". But eleven years later the phrase is changed to "pastors and delegates duly appointed". This alteration may have been influenced by a debate in the B.U. Council on the action of the Moss Side Church, Manchester, in appointing a woman to represent them at the B.U. Assembly. The Assembly concluded that women were eligible as representatives. The further step was taken in 1902 when the West Malling church appointed Mrs. C. Thompson as their delegate to the Association meetings, and in the following year three were appointed by their churches.

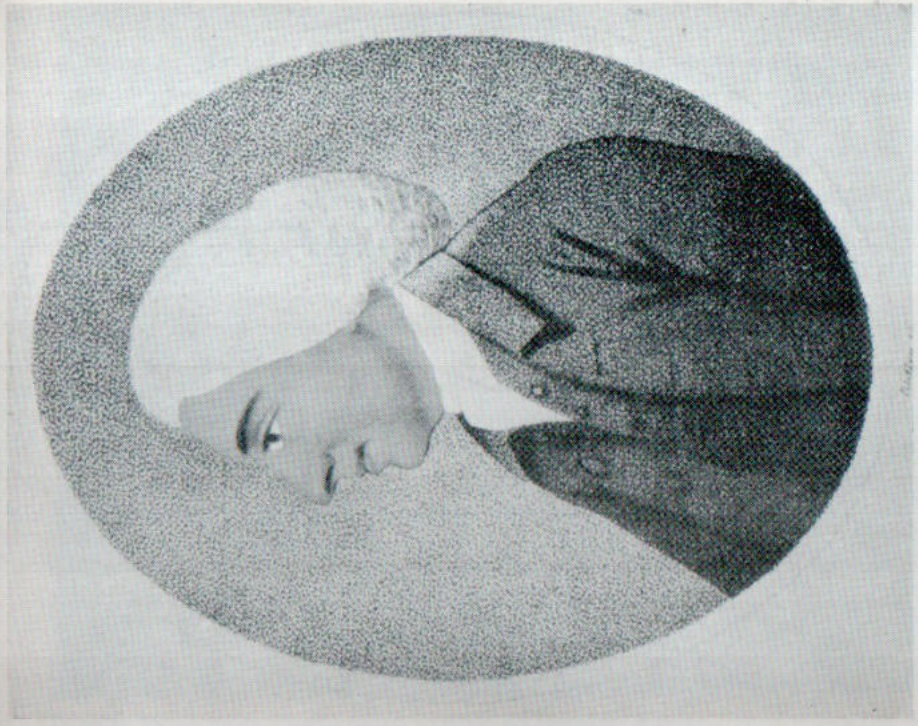
The letters sent in by the churches often illumine the times in which they are written. One country church reports in 1876 that "it is no longer found necessary to read the hymns verse by verse on the Lord's Day", a reminder that the country was emerging from the time when few members of the congregation could read for themselves. In 1889 a town church reports that it "has fitted a heating apparatus". There were many churches which were without any form of heating at a still later date. Yet not all the older churches were unheated. As far back as 1702 the ancient General Baptist church at Tunbridge Wells passed the resolution that "ye disorders of peoples long sitting by ye fire and crowding it up, while others thereby cannot receive benefit from ye fier . . . be reproved". Another resolution at the same church meeting may be linked with an overheated atmosphere, "that unreasonable sleeping in ye meeting to ye shame of ye professions and the griefe of ye brotherhood, is to be reproved by ye elder".

Throughout these last thirty years there had been a steady advance. There was a welcome breadth of interest which had not always been present in Association life. It was concerned with national and international events, with social conditions, and with fellow Baptists at home and in other countries. It supported the Baptist Union through years when many Associations and churches stood aloof. They must have been heartening years for ministers and church workers. The preaching of the Gospel met with a ready response for few hearers questioned the truth or the relevance of the message proclaimed. In these thirty years the 28 churches had increased to 60, members from 1,396 to 8,168, teachers from 364 to 1,231, scholars from 4,033 to 11,557, gifts to the B.M.S. from

£460 to £1,780, and gifts to Home Missions from £65 to £570. In this period the Association was far more than a collection of churches. It had developed a life of its own, uniting, initiating, inspiring. This feeling of its being a living force may be due partly to the fact that a number of the men who figured then in Association life lived on into the twentieth century and were known by many who are alive today. The Association meetings are no longer attended by ghosts but by men and women like ourselves.

The following list of churches with the numbers of their members and Sunday School scholars is taken from the 1899 Association Year Book. It can be noted that the churches that were in the Association in 1869 have, with two exceptions, increased in strength, some of them considerably.

	Mem.	*Schol.*
Ashford	296	403
Battle	43	56
Brabourne	81	101
Brasted	86	180
Brighton:		
Florence Road	23	240
Holland Road	273	250
Queen Square	151	120
Sussex Street	87	175
Broadstairs	32	—
New Brompton	334	563
Burgess Hill	44	52
Canterbury	314	254
Chatham	239	600
Crawley	66	125
Crockenhill	75	75
Deal	184	465
Dover	364	509
Eastbourne	215	181
Edenbridge	168	248
Eynsford	48	120
Eythorne	217	394
Faversham	81	266
Folkestone	289	511
Foots Cray	—	—
Forest Row	49	70
Goudhurst	44	160
Halling	28	185
Hastings	228	300
Hawkhurst	64	79
Herne Bay	132	235
Lewes	132	235
Loose	55	70
Maidstone	149	132
Margate	234	213
Orpington	198	476
Pembury	58	98
Portslade	93	138
Ramsgate:		
Cavendish	294	252
Ellington	92	158
Reading Street	16	46
Rochester	123	240
New Romney	64	130
St. Leonard's	174	125
St. Peter's	83	95
Sandhurst	80	89
Sevenoaks	222	140
Sheerness	76	120
Shoreham (Sussex)	37	89
Shoreham (Kent)	15	45
Sittingbourne	362	852
Tenterden	77	119
Smarden	23	56
Tonbridge	162	260
Tunbridge Wells:		
Calverley Road	459	240
St. John's	68	65
Uphill	64	84
West Malling	87	122
Whitstable	63	90
Worthing	221	341
Yalding	59	30



JONATHAN PURCHIS
Pastor at Shallows, Thanet, 1762-1800

REV. W. BARKER
Hastings 1863-1890. Association Home Missions' Secretary 1866-1890

G. H. Dean, Sittingbourne
Association Treasurer 1882-1925

Rev. W. R. Chesterton
Ashford 1910-1920, Worthing 1920-1943

CHAPTER XIII

THE KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION 1900 TO 1929

THE Association entered the twentieth century with confidence and hopefulness. They had reason for this. The Nonconformist churches had greatly prospered in the previous fifty years and had become a power to be reckoned with in the religious and political life of the land. The Association itself had more than doubled its membership. Its members shared in the growing prosperity of the country and there seemed no reason why the next years should not show yet further progress. It was true that there was a war in South Africa, but it was a long way off and at this stage was fought mainly by professional soldiers. A world war was inconceivable.

One of the outstanding features of Baptist life in this period is the quite amazing way in which the Baptist Union, under the strong, imaginative leadership of the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare, became an effective force in the life of the Baptist churches and Associations. He was appointed secretary to the Union in 1898 and his influence was felt at once. One of his first tasks was to celebrate the new century by raising a Twentieth Century Fund of £250,000 for extension work. Half of this was to be used for extension work at home and the other for various purposes, including aid to the Annuity Fund, helping churches to support pastors, and providing its own headquarters for the Baptist Union. Up till then the Union had wielded little influence, but now it assumed a leadership which affected all the churches, for the administration of the Fund established frequent contact between the Union and the Associations. It is noticeable that nearly all the new ventures undertaken by the Association in this period were instigated from the newly erected Church House.

Evangelism continues to play a large part in Association activities. Most of the churches joined in the Free Church Simultaneous Mission of 1901, and nearly every church in the Association was fostering a mission church in its neighbourhood. In 1900 St. Margaret's, where Dover had been working for 100 years, opened its present chapel. Deal was busy in Walmer, and Folkestone at Cheriton. Worthing built a School Chapel for West Tarring and Eythorne kept up its fine tradition. In 1902 it was supporting 11 preaching stations and 8 Sunday Schools in an area of 50 square miles. "We have 17 local preachers, men with stout hearts and strong legs". The Home Missions Society helped many of the churches to maintain their mission work by annual grants as well as helping to maintain a ministry by direct grants to churches. The Twentieth Century Fund had made available larger resources for this work.

New organisations were enlisted for the churches' work. The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement proved a useful means of reaching men outside the churches. A small cause like Battle was able to report in 1908 that more than 150 men gathered there on Sunday afternoons. Ramsgate Church was attracting a congregation of more than a 1,000 to its services on Sunday evenings in the Theatre. Dover formed a Boys' Brigade Company in 1908, and in 1912 there is a mention of Mothers' Meetings. These may have been an old institution but they had not been mentioned before in the reports from the churches.

All the time new chapels and school halls were being built and new churches added to the Association, nineteen of them before 1914. Work was started in Bognor in 1899 by the Worthing church, services being conducted by preachers from Worthing and students from Spurgeon's College. In 1900 a church was formed, and a pastor invited. In this first year five were baptised and the church joined the Association. In 1903 they built their school chapel. The work at this westerly outpost of the Association prospered from the first. Bromley Common also was received into the Association in 1900. This cause began in 1861 with cottage meetings and through the able help of a Mr. Nettleton who settled here, the work prospered. The Hall built in 1870 had to be enlarged from time to time. After Mr. Nettleton's health failed the work faltered, but was

revived through the help of C. H. Spurgeon. One of his students became the first pastor and a church was formed in 1892. When the church was received into the Association there were 76 members and 127 scholars. In Green St. Green a group had been worshipping for some years before Orpington took the oversight just before the end of the century. A church was formed in 1900 to which Orpington contributed six members. The Seaford church originated in the concern of one man, Walter Nokes, a secretary of the Ferme Park church, who moved here in 1899. He and other Baptists in the town engaged an evangelist and built a temporary hall, and in 1901 a pastor was invited and a few months later a church of 23 members was formed. The Baptist church in Frant, with a membership of 38, became a member in 1901. Its buildings were dilapidated but it was alive and could record 6 baptisms in 1904. A few years later there were complaints of lack of growth, but the church survived on into post-war years, though with diminished numbers. Three churches were welcomed in 1902. One was the small, but long established, village church of 19 members at Uckfield. The Strict and Particular Baptists built a chapel here in the closing years of the eighteenth century. The present building was erected in 1874, by which time the church had moved away from the "Strict" position. The second church, Rye, was an even older church, for it was founded in 1750. It joined the new Association of Strict Baptists in 1845, but now returned to its former allegiance. For many years its membership had rarely exceeded 30 in number. The formation of a Baptist church in Newhaven was a revival of a church which joined the Association in 1869. The name of Sargeant is involved in both of them. The first had its origin in the eagerness of W. T. Sargeant, a Spurgeon's College student, to do something for his native town. A friend of the family built for him what is now the Methodist schoolroom. Mr. Spurgeon paid the rent of this for three years, and in 1868 a church of 13 members was formed with W. T. Sargeant as the first pastor. The church increased to 30 members in the next three years, but it did not long survive the untimely death of Mr. Sargeant in 1871 and it had ceased to function by 1877. It was not until 1899 that a few Baptist friends, joined by Samuel Sargeant, the brother of the former pastor, were helped by the Association to re-commence the work. A church

of 20 members was formed and a school built. The present church building was opened in 1938.

Gravesend re-joined in 1903. It became a member in 1885 but lapsed. The church fell on difficult days but recovered by the turn of the century. In 1906 it secured its present chapel and named it Emmanuel. Its membership then was 142. Horsham is the home of one of the earliest Baptist churches in Sussex. Matthew Caffyn began his ministry here in 1648 and by then the church was well established. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this church was avowedly Unitarian, and there was no Baptist community in the town until the present church was formed in 1895 with 11 members. When it joined the Association in 1903 it had grown into a strong community of over 100 members, and it went on from strength to strength. It was an outward-looking church. In 1902, two of its members went to China as missionaries, and it soon started mission stations at Broadbridge Heath, Trafalgar Road, and at Watersfield, fifteen miles away. Gloucester Place, Brighton, became a member in 1904. The founding of this church was a remarkable achievement, when it is remembered how tenaciously Baptist churches cling to their independent existence. Dr. Shakespeare and other leaders believed that in a growing town like Brighton the Baptists should have a strong church in a central position. There were four Baptist churches in the town—Holland Road at Hove, Florence Road to the North, and Sussex Street and Queen Square near the centre. After much consultation with these churches and their ministers, the two central churches agreed to give up their separate existence and, joining together, to form the nucleus of the membership of a new central church in Gloucester Place. The church was opened in 1904 under the temporary leadership of the Rev. J. Felmingham, who gave way to the Rev. Joseph Gay in 1905. The Bexhill church owes its existence to Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon who spent a holiday there in 1895 and sought in vain for a Baptist meeting. She gradually came to feel called to establish a Baptist church in this growing town in memory of her husband. She arranged for the Rev. J. S. Hockey to spend some months in the place and the response to his ministry was so good that she enlisted the aid of the members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in building first a Lecture Hall and then a Chapel that was opened in 1898. A church of 40

members had been formed the year before. It joined the Association in 1906.

It was in the same year that the small church at Cudham, with its 29 members, became a member. Work had been started here by Mr. and Mrs. Wallis, who built a room primarily for children's services. Parents and others came and Mr. Wallis built a wooden chapel. He acted as pastor until 1900. From the beginning it was a sturdy church, and by 1907 it was running three mission stations—at Leaves Green, Biggin Hill and Tatsfield. Littlehampton came into the Association in 1908. For some years the Worthing church had explored the possibility of establishing a Baptist cause there. A church was formed which by 1911 had 55 members and a Sunday School of over 100 members. Its chief difficulty then was lack of accommodation. They were compelled to meet in a hall which was part of a public house and not a suitable situation for youth work. For many years the Deal church had carried on work in Walmer. The work had prospered and when it became an independent church in 1908, a year before joining the Association, there were 184 members. The Bessels Green church had stood aloof ever since 1846 and the breaking up of the West Kent Baptist Association. Her membership remained small for a long time, but a few years before she rejoined the Association in 1913 the work had revived and she brought 114 members into the Association. The village of Horsmonden was received by the Association in 1914. This church is linked with the name of Robert Burr, a carpenter born and confirmed in Horsmonden. When he was seventeen he was taken to a service in a neighbouring village which was conducted by J. J. Kendon, of Goudhurst. He was converted, baptised, and began to share in Sunday School teaching and local preaching. He often preached in a little mission room in Horsmonden and in 1878 a church was formed and Burr was asked to be their pastor. The church grew and the members built a chapel at the cost of £700. Robert Burr served this church, without monetary reward, for forty years.

Four churches make but a brief appearance in the Association. The church at Pulborough was received in at the 1904 annual meetings, but it is not included in the Association list of churches nor is any attendance or report from the church recorded. A second Dover church (Queen Street) appears in

1906, but four years later financial difficulties forced them to sell their heavily mortgaged premises and to close down. Foots Cray joined the Association in 1883 but transferred to the London Association in 1902. She repeated this by returning to the Association in 1914 and rejoining the London Association four years later. The Broadstairs church (Providence), which was welcomed into the Association in 1908, was the church formed in 1844. This was the third time they had joined the Association and this was due to a change of pastorate. In 1904 they invited Charles Bloy to the pastorate. He was a good and gracious man but he was not a Strict Baptist. Close communion was not observed and the deeds of the chapel were lodged with the Baptist Union. When he died in 1924 the Strict Baptists secured the possession of the deeds and the church retired from the Association.

Up to 1914 the work of the Association progressed smoothly. New churches were established and the zeal for evangelism continued. Support for foreign missionary work increased and several churches had given men and women to work in the church at home and overseas. The Bognor church, which was only formed in 1900, had three of its members training for the ministry. Attendance at Association meetings was excellent and the churches responded well to any demand that was made upon them. Yet as the century advances a certain uneasiness becomes plain. The response to the church's message was not so immediate nor so widespread as it had been. Men's interests were turning more and more from religion to politics and social reform. This awareness that all was not well finds expression in the subjects discussed at Association and District meetings. In 1903 the Association was discussing "Why are conversions so rare?" There is concern at the slow increase in membership. Methods of making worship more attractive to the unchurched are debated. In 1908 an Association statement asserts that "We view with concern the condition of the Church of Christ as a whole". It speaks of "the decline of membership, the indifference to public worship, the neglect of the prayer meeting, the paucity of conversions". The preamble to the report of the Association secretary in the spring of 1914 contains these words: "I am anxious not to depress, but I must be faithful; there is little to tell of outward and visible success". The work of the churches was not helped by the trade depression and the widespread unemployment in the years before the war broke out. Much suffering was endured, much bitterness engendered. Men moved in search of work and the emigration figures were high.

The debates on motions continue to occupy much time in the annual Assemblies. Education is a recurring feature. There were bitter attacks on the 1902 Balfour Education Act, which used rates to support the Anglican schools. Thousands of dissenters suffered the distraint of their goods or imprisonment for refusing to pay these rates. There are frequent references to pastors and others in prison. The evils of the time are dealt with —intemperance, gambling, sweated labour, Sunday games and other desecrations of the Sabbath Day. Foreign affairs are not neglected. Motions condemn the Belgian atrocities in the Congo and the conditions under which Chinese labour is employed in South Africa. The B.M.S. has frequent mention in motions urging the necessity and urgency of missionary work. In 1907 the Association is called to pray for "the Amazonian Mission and for the two pioneers into that region". The dearth of candidates is deplored. A contemporary note is sounded in the protest against "the cruel treatment of the Portugese Government to the Rev. J. S. Bowskill of San Salvador, and his native helpers", and an appeal for intervention is made to H.M. Government. Many of the proposals are concerned with the Association's affairs. A Sunday School committee is set up in 1902, and a Loan Fund is established to provide interest-free loans to the churches. In 1908 the Districts were asked to devote a special session to the Baptist Union scheme for Ministerial Settlement, Sustentation and Collegiate training, and in 1912 the Association pledges itself to support the raising of the Sustentation Fund of £250,000. The purpose of the Fund was to augment the stipends of the worst paid ministers, to appoint General Superintendents in ten areas, and to facilitate the removal and settlement of ministers. The Fund was completed in 1914. The Association contributed £12,000.

In 1904 a significant change was made in the basis of membership. Since its formation in 1835, as in the 1779 Association, Rule I had read "that this Association consist of Particular Baptist churches in Kent and Sussex". It is now altered to "that this Kent and Sussex Association of Baptist churches

consist only of evangelical churches practising believers' baptism".

International relations were not forgotten. In 1910 the Association approved the Taft-Grey proposals for peaceful co-operation between the U.S.A. and Britain, and in 1912 and 1913 two motions were passed which have an ironic sound in view of what was to happen. The first thanks the Government for its attempts to establish more friendly relations with Germany. The second congratulates Sir Edward Grey and the Government on their success in maintaining the peace of Europe, expresses satisfaction in the improvement in our relations with Germany, and denounces national service as unnecessary and a menace to the peace of the world.

These motions reflect the general outlook of the British people. After the long decades of peace the folly of war seemed inconceivable. Thus the outbreak of war in August, 1914, came to most people with all the shock of the totally unexpected. The light-hearted expectation of a speedy end to the fighting did not long survive, and the nation entered on four years of conflict which were to drain its resources in money and destroy the flower of its youth. They were difficult years for all, including the churches. As men were progressively called up, the churches were denuded of male workers, and many who were in reserved occupations were working on the Sundays. A church like Gillingham, in a dockyard area, lost nearly all its men teachers. Ministers went as chaplains or undertook part-time war work. Premises were commandeered and much youth work was brought to a standstill. The strain was heavy, for most people had loved ones in the fighting forces and lived in dread of the telegraph boy. The reports from the churches reflect the pressure exercised by anxiety, overwork, and rationed and expensive food. One minor casualty was that no Association meetings were held in 1917 and 1918, principally because rationing made entertaining almost impossible. Yet though the war brought difficulties, it also brought opportunities. Churches opened their premises as canteens and rest rooms for the men stationed in the neighbourhood, and many opened their homes not only to the men but to their wives and mothers. To many men the Christian community and the Christians' Lord became real and meaningful for the first time.

In view of the casualties and the long break of thousands of young men and women from church life and worship, together with the handicaps under which the church had been doing its work, it is surprising that when the war ended the Association was nearly as strong, numerically at least, as when hostilities began. Between 1914 and 1920 the membership dropped by 600, and Sunday School scholars by 1,300. A major reason that it was no worse is that the Sustentation scheme came into operation in January, 1916, and the Rev. T. Woodhouse was appointed the General Superintendent of the Southern Area. He was able to keep in touch with the churches, heartening the discouraged, guiding the uncertain, and through the Sustentation Fund enabling churches to maintain a ministry in difficult days. In the first year grants were made to seventeen churches, and, although the maximum grant at that time was £80, the sums allocated made it possible for some churches who otherwise would have been leaderless, to invite a pastor and in all cases made it possible for the churches to pay a stipend on which men could live. The Association continued its own special work of helping churches and missions who could not raise the minimum amount needed to qualify for a Sustentation grant.

Headcorn was the only church received into the Association during the war. This was one of the early Baptist churches which became Unitarian. Its new chapel, built in 1819, was named 'The Unitarian Baptist Chapel'. But about 40 years later the church turned from the General Baptists to more orthodox views. Its first Trinitarian pastor ministered from 1880-1887, but it was not until 1915 that it joined the Association. Its membership was then about 20. Only five more churches became members in the next 14 years. They were Birchington in 1924, Beltinge in 1925, Victoria Drive, Eastbourne, in 1926, Peacehaven and Hadlow Down in 1927. There had been a series of causes in Birchington, the first in 1740, but each one had been short lived. In 1924 a Free Church was formed but a little later the paedo-Baptist members withdrew and the church became a Baptist church with an open membership. Work was begun in Beltinge by the Herne Bay church in 1900 by holding cottage meetings. It was soon found necessary to find larger premises and in 1903 an attractive chapel was built and the work grew steadily. It became an

independent church in 1925. The Victoria Drive church originated from a group which held meetings in a cottage, and then in a barn, for three years before building a Mission Hall in Crown Street in 1889. This work was handed over to the Ceylon Place church and eventually became a Baptist cause with its membership at Ceylon Place. In 1909 a hall was bought and renamed ' Crown Street Baptist Hall'. In 1925 29 worshippers at this Hall formed themselves into a separate church and in 1926 they built the church in Victoria Drive. The Peacehaven church was a small cause. Its life in the Association was very brief. No representative attended a meeting of the Association and in 1937 its name was erased from the list of member churches. The work at Hadlow Down began in Buxted. Mr. H. Dean, after carrying on the work here for 9 years, persuaded the Association to take it over. He had built a Mission Hall and this he removed and rebuilt on a better site in the neighbouring village of Hadlow Down. The work, under the care of a succession of missionaries, fluctuated considerably, but in 1920 a church was formed with 20 members, and two years later the Rev. E. J. Halford took charge. He did excellent work until he retired in 1939, but the work then collapsed and was closed down in 1940. Eventually the premises were sold, half of the proceeds helping to build the Moulsecoomb church. For nearly 40 years the Association made annual grants of £15-£20 to this work.

The early post-war years saw two large Denominational Funds launched and many new organisations founded. The Baptist United Fund was raised in 1921 and 1922. The cost of living had increased during the war, creating difficulties for the Missionary Society and for the home churches. The Fund of £250,000, divided between the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society, helped to relieve the strain on missionaries and ministers alike. The Superannuation Fund was adopted in 1926 to help make provision for retired ministers. The Association contributed generously to both Funds.

Up to 1899 the Association had been content to have a Home Missions Society, a Missionary and a Temperance committee. Between 1916 and 1929 a number of new features and new organisations were introduced, almost all of them originating from the Baptist Union. The Baptist Women's League was commended to the churches in 1916 and this provided a

stimulus to the women of the churches and, like the Sustentation Fund, strengthened the ties between the churches and the Union. Sundays on which special interests are stressed make their appearance, including Temperance and Young People's Sundays. The Association shared in the Personal Evangelism Campaign of 1922, in which the Rev. Douglas Brown was a leading figure and Dr. John Clifford an ardent supporter. "Every Christian a missionary" was the watchword. A Site and Extension committee was set up to help churches in the choice of building sites and to examine districts for possible pioneer work. A representative for Baptist work in Europe was appointed and the Temperance committee was replaced by the Moral and Social Questions committee. Most of the Kent and Sussex churches took part in the National Young Life Campaign. A Young People's committee was appointed. Christian education was discussed in the Association and at District level, and a special committee was set up to investigate conditions in the Baptist Sunday Schools in the area and to make suggestions for their improvement. The energetic leadership at headquarters was giving the Association much to think about and much to achieve.

The main interests of the Association, apart from denominational affairs, as far as they are revealed in the discussions, lay in the promotion of social justice at home and peace among the nations. Motions were passed supporting the League of Nations, expressing misgivings that certain clauses in the Peace Treaty did not embody the principles laid down at the Armistice, and urging disarmament. Others dealt with housing, unemployment, education, cleansing of the press, temperance and gambling. There is little evidence in the Association records that this more vigorous concern for the bodies of men diminished the churches' concern for their souls. It is heartening to read the reports which came in from the churches with their repeated witness to devoted and sacrificial service. The fine spirit of the Association in those days was partly due to the quality of its leaders. There were a number of men with considerable gifts of mind and character who served the Association and the churches through the greater part of these 30 years. In North East Kent were three men who spent all their ministerial life in the churches they helped to found. They were John Doubleday at Sittingbourne for 40 years,

W. W. Blocksidge at Gillingham for 45 years and G. Anderson Miller at Rochester for 37 years. In South East Kent Nicholas Dobson went to the Deal church from Spurgeon's College in 1873 and remained there for 36 years. He was an honoured and loved figure in his church and in the Association which he served as Minute Secretary for 14 years and General Secretary for 15 years. It was during his ministry that the Victoria Road church was built and a new church at Walmer and Mission Rooms in Mongeham and Sholden. He was twice Moderator of the Association and served for 30 years on the B.U. Council and B.M.S. general committee. Walter Holyoak was another pastor who spent all his ministerial years in Kent, 29 of them at Salem, Dover. J. C. Carlile came to Folkestone in 1898 after ministries in Dockhead and Marylebone and served the Rendezvous Street church for 40 years. His many activities prevented him from taking a very active part in the Association. He was prominent in the councils of the Union and the Missionary Society. He was the Baptist Union President in 1921 and for 16 years edited the *Baptist Times*.

There were other men who spent all or almost all their years in the Association. J. H. Marshall was 36 years at Crockenhill and Tenterden. J. T. Castle moved to Rye after 30 years at St. Peter's and was Association Minute secretary for most of this time. T. Hancocks, in 1927, completed 50 years' ministry in Kent and was for 25 years secretary of the Home Missions Society before he handed over his responsibilities to the General Superintendent. There were many laymen who gave equally long and devoted service to the Association, among them Mr. G. H. Dean, of Sittingbourne, Association treasurer for 43 years, who was generous in gifts of money and equally generous in the time and energy he spent in the service of the Association and the churches he loved. It was the service of men like these, and of many whose names are not recorded, which maintained through troubled years faith, unity and enterprise in the Baptist churches of Kent and Sussex.

The figures in the 1929 Association reports show that in the previous 30 years the churches have increased from 60 to 77, local preachers from 263 to 309, members 8,168 to 10,209, teachers 1,231 to 1,753, scholars 11,557 to 12, 899. Missionary offerings rose from £1,780 to £5,250. The baptisms are fewer: 464 decreasing to 295, but the number of baptisms varies

considerably from year to year. The following list of churches and their members and Sunday School scholars is also taken from the 1929 Year Book.

Association statistics, 1929

CANTERBURY DISTRICT	*Mem.*	*Schol.*
Beltinge	60	61
Birchington	23	44
Broadstairs:		
Queens Road	109	63
St. Peter's	71	177
Canterbury	277	433
Deal	148	148
Dover	349	386
Eythorne	187	382
Faversham	68	219
Folkestone	482	529
Herne Bay	178	190
Margate	215	223
Ramsgate	288	199
Reading Street	—	—
Walmer	180	137
Whitstable	161	145
MAIDSTONE DISTRICT		
Bessels Green	53	103
Brasted	61	86
Bromley Common	80	287
Chatham	132	592
Crockenhill	65	88
Cudham	73	175
Eynsford	78	100
Gillingham	388	585
Gravesend	179	280
Halling	35	138
Maidstone	198	260
Orpington	181	273
Rochester	214	254
Sevenoaks	190	178
Sheerness	87	203
Shoreham, Kent	31	34
Sittingbourne	270	286
West Malling	85	86
Yalding	33	91
Green St. Green	115	117
BRIGHTON DISTRICT		
Bognor	137	50
Brighton:		
Florence Road	313	248
Gloucester Place	208	183
Holland Road	368	420
Burgess Hill	30	40
Crawley	75	65
Eastbourne:		
Ceylon Place	263	139
Victoria Drive	170	164
Forest Row	48	60
Hadlow Down	28	29
Horsham	139	235
Lewes	124	125
Littlehampton	60	37
Newhaven	36	94
Peacehaven	31	29
Portslade	102	308
Seaford	48	57
Shoreham (Sussex)	109	245
Uckfield	11	—
Worthing	512	616
HASTINGS DISTRICT		
Ashford	362	360
Battle	28	56
Bexhill	140	241
Brabourne	34	92
Edenbridge	85	88
Frant	19	42
Goudhurst	27	59
Hastings	204	206
Hawkhurst	47	70
Headcorn	19	25
Horsmonden	30	81
New Romney	42	50
Pembury	64	90
Rye	45	85
St. Leonards	143	60
Sandhurst	34	45
Smarden	17	23
Tenterden	44	67
Tonbridge	176	280
Tunbridge Wells:		
Calverly Road	400	103
St. John's	156	80

CHAPTER XIV

THE KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION 1930 TO 1962

THE pattern of events in this period is very similar to that of the previous thirty years. It is marked by the same steady work of the churches in building up Baptist causes in their neighbourhood until they are able to stand on their own feet. In this period also there are a number of special campaigns concerned with youth work, evangelism, Christian education and the raising of Funds, and in the middle of it the 1914-1918 War is paralleled by the second World War. The work of the churches grows more difficult as the gap between the Christian communities and the mass of the people becomes wider, and there is much discouragement and heart searching. But there was manifest also an eager desire to bridge the gulf. Discussions on this situation were frequent and there were many experiments.

In the years before the war broke out a number of churches were welcomed into the Association. The Cheriton church joined in 1930. The work here was started by the Folkestone church in 1901. A church was built in 1908 and, after a brief period under a student pastor, the Rev. J. Daniel, assistant minister to Dr. Carlile, took charge of the work. The cause developed well and became independent in 1929 when the membership was 73. Ten years later it had risen to 131. One of the first deacons elected in 1910 was Mr. H. G. Coping. He served the church as secretary for at least 35 years and the prosperity of the work owed much to him and his wife. The West Worthing church became a member in 1931. In 1896 the Worthing church bought a hall and later erected a building in West Tarring. For some years it was under the care of the evangelists whom Christchurch Road engaged to take the

oversight of their six mission stations, but in 1928 they invited a minister of their own and three years later the West Tarring Mission became the West Worthing church. The present church was built in 1938. Its membership in 1931 was 64; in 1962 it was 363. In 1933 the small church on Westerham Hill, with its 30 members, joined the Association, and two years later the Preston Park Church, Brighton, became a member. This was one of several causes sponsored by the churches of Brighton, the Florence Road church having a special interest in this additional work in her district. Aylesham was the next church to join. When the Kent coalfields were being opened up, the Kent Coal Commission allocated a site in the village to the Baptists and the Canterbury church agreed to take responsibility for beginning work here which would minister to the miners who were flocking into the county from the depressed areas in S. Wales, Scotland and N. England. A chapel was built in 1927, mostly through the generosity of the Canterbury friends, and a church with 26 members was formed the year after. The work fluctuated considerably. In 1936 there were 230 children in the Sunday School and six years later only 25. But by 1957 a new Hall had to be built to accommodate their youth organisations. The churches at Broadwater and Petts Wood were welcomed in 1938. The former began in 1903 when the Worthing church started evening services and a Sunday School here, and in 1905 a building in Penfold Road was erected and other temporary buildings were added as the work rapidly grew. Mr. W. H. Bird, a lay preacher in the Worthing church, gave up his business in 1911 to devote himself to the Broadwater and West Tarring causes. In 1937 a church of 52 members was formed and in 1938 the present buildings were put in hand. By then the Broadwater church had over 250 children in the Sunday School, the largest in Worthing. It was the Orpington church who started the Petts Wood cause when in 1931 it opened a Sunday school in the Poverest Road district. This was not successful, but three years later a Sunday School was started in a large room in Poverest Farm House, and the next year evening services were held. In 1936 a Church Hall was built in Poverest Road and the Rev. P. N. Bushill, the Orpington minister, held a service of valediction and dedication for the 36 members from Orpington who were forming the new cause. They became a church in 1938.

In 1939 the churches at Heathfield, Willingdon and Aldwick were received into the Association. The Heathfield cause had its origin in the zeal of the Rev. J. C. Thomson, who came to the village in 1893 on health grounds after 11 years at Brondesbury Baptist church. When he got better he began services and built up a Christian community which, in 1899, formed themselves into a Union church of 34 members, with Mr. Thomson as minister. The church was built in 1901, and schoolroom and manse were added later. The church, which had 67 members when it joined the Association, is affiliated to the Baptist Union and the Congregational Union. In 1935 Sister Lena Parkinson, a Baptist deaconess, began work in the rapidly growing area of Willingdon. The need of premises became urgent and the Free Churches of Eastbourne united to provide a place of worship. It was opened in 1938 and in the same year a Free Church was formed of 41 members. The members of the Worthing church had been working in Aldwick for several years before the Aldwick Free Church was formed with 18 members in 1938. In that same year they opened a place of worship, bought a Manse and invited the Rev. G. E. Johnston as their first minister. Work was restricted during the war when their premises were commandeered but it was taken up energetically when the war ended. Mr. Johnston led the cause until he died in 1954. With the exception of Heathfield all these churches were newly formed and each one was the fruit of the vision and generosity in service and money of an older church. Three of them sprang from the evangelistic enterprise of the Worthing church.

Before the war broke out the Baptist Union set on foot two ventures in which most of the Kent and Sussex churches joined. The first was the Discipleship Campaign in the autumn of 1932. It was directed chiefly to young people. For the most part it was an internal enterprise, each church examining its Sunday School and Youth Work and drawing its youth into groups to study the meaning of Christian discipleship. Many young people made the decision to follow Christ and the number of baptisms increased slightly in the next two years. The second venture was the Forward Movement launched in 1936. Its purpose was to raise a million pounds for Extension Work. The Association, in conjunction with the commissioners for Kent and Sussex appointed from headquarters, approved

schemes which enabled several churches to provide premises more adequate to their work.

In 1930 the Rev. Thomas Woodhouse was compelled by severe heart trouble to give up his work as General Superintendent of the Southern Area. For nearly 15 years he had given unremitting care to the churches in his charge. He was followed by the Rev. S. G. Morris, who brought to the task the experience gained in his notable 30 years' ministry in Upper Holloway and whose warm-hearted concern endeared him to the churches he served. After three years he was called to undertake the Superintendency of the Metropolitan Area and in 1934 the Rev. H. H. Sutton came to us from the West End church, Hammersmith. He was area Superintendent for 12 years, a period which included five years of war. His inspiring preaching and devoted pastoral care helped to maintain the faith and courage of ministers and churches. He left us to become Principal of the Baptist Women's Training College. The Rev. W. D. Jackson resigned from the Ramsden Road church, Balham, to become our Superintendent in 1946 and for 8 years served the churches of our Association with wisdom, energy and sturdy conviction. The Metropolitan Area claimed him as Superintendent and the Rev. H. V. Larcombe succeeded him. He had long experience of pastoral and administrative work and served us devotedly until his sudden and fatal breakdown in health in 1960. In 1961 the Rev. V. C. Evans took up the work, coming to the area after 27 years in the ministry, 14 of which were spent in Canterbury.

It is impossible to measure accurately the debt our churches owe to these men who, through years that were often testing and sometimes depressing and even tragic, years when there were many influences at work to disintegrate church life, moved untiringly among us, counselling, heartening and inspiring. They have proved to be a tower of strength to many smaller churches, some of which might have ceased to exist if it had not been for the counsel, financial help and leadership which the Superintendents were able to obtain for them. When difficulties or dissensions have arisen they have proved themselves patient, and usually successful, mediators and not a few ministers in times of personal stress have found them to be in truth fathers in God.

The Association resolutions fall into previous patterns.

A few are concerned with denominational affairs, but most are looking outwards. There are resolutions about the persecution of Russian Baptists, about slavery and the Drink Traffic in Palestine, the Gold Coast and in territories under British administration, and about cruelty to Jewish minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. There is a strong protest against Italy's cruel invasion of Abyssinia, and an expression of disappointment that the hopes based on the League of Nations have fallen so short of fulfilment. There is concern about slums, unemployment, the distressed areas in South Wales and disarmament. Intemperance, gambling, Sunday observance, and education have a frequent place.

Few innovations were made in these years before the war. In 1932 the Rev. S. G. Morris arranged a three days Retreat at Arundel House for ministers in pastoral office, and this proved so helpful that these Retreats have become a regular annual event. In 1938 Mrs. Frank Lefevre, of Canterbury, became the first woman to be elected Moderator of the Association.

The Association statistics from 1930 to 1939 remained at a fairly steady level. There is a slight decrease in the number of baptisms, local preachers and Sunday School teachers. Contributions to the B.M.S. continued at an almost constant figure. The happiest feature is the slight increase nearly every year in the number of church members, and the most ominous fact is the steady decrease of Sunday School scholars. In Kent and Sussex this downward trend began in 1924 when the numbers dropped to under 14,000. By 1939 there were fewer than 11,000 in spite of discipleship campaigns of various kinds and a considerable amount of canvassing from house to house.

The outbreak of war in 1939 did not come with the shock of the unexpected for the nation had been aware for many months of the possibility of conflict. In the first year the effects on the churches were not strongly marked, but when bombing began and steadily increased in intensity, the situation grew bleaker. Church members were called to serve in the Forces and the various branches of Civil Defence, or to work long hours in the factories. Some organisations ceased to function because premises were commandeered. An Association which included so many churches in coastal areas was disastrously affected by evacuation. Some churches lost almost all their Sunday School scholars and, in especially vulnerable areas, a greater part

of their members. The position grew more difficult as the war went on. In 1942 the reports from the 17 churches of the Canterbury District showed that 9 of them had lost more than two thirds of their members, 8 were without ministers, and 2 had closed because they had united for the time being with other denominations. Much ground was lost and by no means all of it was recovered after the war ended. Not all who had left the churches returned to them. Yet when one remembers the strength of the forces adverse to Christian faith and living to which our young men and women were subject for more than five years there is reason for thanksgiving that the churches in our Association recovered so well. In the next few years our church membership was to rise to its highest peak.

Three churches joined the Association in the war years. The church at Loose, Maidstone, which had been a member from 1881 to 1919, rejoined in 1940, and in the same year the Findon Valley Free Church (Baptist) became a member. Work had been carried on in the neighbouring hamlet of Nepcote for some years, first by Plymouth Brethren and then by Baptists, before it came under the care of the Worthing church in 1881. They maintained the work until 1939 when services were begun in Findon itself, whose population was increasing rapidly. The war made it impossible to build a permanent place of worship, but a temporary building was erected and a church formed of 21 members. The church has never looked back and in 1947 a minister was invited, half of his stipend being paid by the Findon Valley church and half by the Christchurch Road church. In 1962 its membership had risen to 180. The Durrington Free Church joined the Association in 1943. Cottage meetings were being held here in 1905, and when more room was needed the Worthing Free Church Council helped the friends to hire a school for evening services and in 1912 to erect a small building. It was in this year that a church of 12 members was formed. It proved to be a sturdy and effective community, though it did not greatly increase in numerical strength until after the second world war. In 1949 membership had grown to 100.

More than 30 of the Association churches had one or more Baptist communities which they had initiated and nurtured, sometimes for many years. Some of these became strong

enough to exist independently, even outstripping the parent church; others became independent financially but depended on the mother church for workers and for help in special circumstances; in other cases the senior church continued to bear almost the entire responsibility for the work. During this period of thirty-three years 26 of these groups had grown sufficiently established to form themselves into churches. This practice of propagating their own species is characteristic of the Association churches throughout their existence, and it continues as new areas of population arise. Gillingham has established a centre in the new Twydall estate, the only Free Church place of worship in a population of 6,000; in 1959 the Folkestone church built a Church Hall in the Hill Road new estate; Ashford has built a place of worship in South Ashford which will cost more than £8,000; Crawley, who in 1954 had the expensive task of replacing their bombed church with a place of worship in the new Crawley that is arising, started a Sunday School in the Tilgate area in 1957 and with the aid of the Association built a Hall in 1961 where a flourishing youth work is being carried on. Far more space than can be afforded could profitably be given to record the vision and zeal and sacrifice so evident in the long story of the Association's Home Missions work.

When the war ended the churches took up the task of rebuilding that which had been broken down. The rebuilding of property was the easiest part of the task. A number of church premises were damaged but only Crawley and Halton were entirely destroyed. To the more difficult task of gathering together the broken threads of church life the churches gave themselves with seriousness. The increasing estrangement from the churches, the changing moral standards, the growth of luxury and the advent of television created many difficulties, but gradually the churches built up their depleted organisations. In addition to the steady work carried on in the individual churches and their mission stations the post-war years are marked by two campaigns which were originated and carried through by the Association and a third venture which emanated from the Baptist Union.

The first was the Mid-Century Crusade, 1949-1951. This had its beginning in the mind of the Rev. L. R. Barnard, of the Wellington Square church at Hastings. At a meeting of the

Hastings District in 1947 he urged the need for a campaign of evangelism in view of the returns from the Association churches. These showed that in the past year nearly half of the churches had no baptisms and a third of them had not increased their membership. The idea of a venture in evangelism was welcomed by the other Districts and by the Association. 1949 was a year of preparation. Among other things a survey of Youth and Sunday School work was made, revealing a woeful shortage of teachers. In ten churches the minister was superintendent of the Sunday School, and four Schools had no superintendent. In the next year 57 missions were held. Some aimed to convert the unconverted, but most were intended to strengthen the spiritual vitality of the church members. Nearly all of them were conducted by the ministers and laymen of the Association. Younger people took an active part. The East Kent Young Baptists' Association gathered more than 300 of their young people for an Easter Monday service of witness. The effort was continued in 1951 and more than 70 of our churches took part. There were many converts and churches were awakened and stimulated. The returns from the churches in the Spring of 1951 show that membership increased by 224, and baptisms rose from 364 to 448, the highest figure since 1911. In the following year the gain of members was 281, the highest increase for at least thirty years.

The churches were heartened by the quickening effect of the Campaign and by no means desirous of resting on past achievements. At the 1953 Association meetings this resolution was passed: "This Assembly, recognising the gravity of the situation revealed by the Questionnaire and conscious of the great assets and opportunities in our Sunday Schools and Youth organisations feels led by the Spirit of God to call on the churches to undertake a Four Year Crusade to lift Sunday School and Youth work to a new level of efficiency and usefulness." Much careful preparation went into this effort. Not all the churches responded to the challenge, for there were not always the leaders to make a response, but most of the churches through these years were kept alive to their responsibilities and opportunities. Children's Missions were held, and training courses for teachers and Youth leaders were organised. District Rallies and weekend conferences for young people

proved valuable. The Association statistics of Sunday School children show an upward trend. In the country as a whole the number of Sunday School children had been decreasing since 1921, but in the Association the numbers increased from 10,229 in 1948 to 12,161 in 1955. The Association committee for evangelism and youth continues to keep the churches alert to their responsibilities towards their children and young people.

The third special enterprise was the launching in 1959 of the Baptist Union Ter-Jubilee Campaign with its four year plan. Its purpose was to build up our church members in the Christian faith and practice, to enlist them in the work of evangelism, to instruct them in the facts of our Baptist heritage and to raise a Fund of £300,000 to strengthen the Loan and Home Work Funds, to increase the effectiveness of ministerial training and to strengthen the Departments of the Baptist Union. The Association accepted their share in this task and throughout the four years constant thought and effort were devoted to achieve the purposes for which the Fund was launched. From the beginning emphasis was laid on the teaching of the Bible. Seventy-four of our churches took part in a Church and Bible week which had been prepared for by months of study of selected passages of Scripture in the individual churches. Throughout the Campaign Bible Studies relevant to the task to be done were prepared and widely used. There was persistent evangelistic effort. House-to-house visitation, missions by students and others and experiments with guest nights and film services were carried through. Groups were formed to study Christian belief and living, Baptist history and principles, and the pressing moral and social questions of the time. In the final year the Great Ejectment of 1662 and the founding of the Baptist Union in 1812 were celebrated. These words are written in the closing months of the Campaign and its full effects cannot yet be measured. It has certainly drawn the churches together through sharing in a common task, and the constant encouragement to study the Bible may well prove of permanent value to the spiritual life of the Association.

In these years after the war considerable attention was paid to the lay preachers and their work. In 1945 Mr. S. Walter was elected as Lay Preachers' secretary—apparently there had not been one before—and soon Lay Preachers' District Associations were formed. There were four of these in 1947—Mid-Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton. Meetings for study, series of lectures and an annual conference were arranged. In 1956 Lay Preachers' Sunday was inaugurated and has continued to be an annual feature of the Association's life. Mr. Walter gave himself to this work with unflagging enthusiasm for fifteen years until in 1960 the task was handed over to two secretaries, one for Kent and the other for Sussex.

An effort to arouse more interest in the Home Mission work of the Association was made in 1945. An Association Home Mission secretary was chosen, and churches were urged to appoint their own Home Mission representative and arrange an annual Home Mission evening, while ministers were asked to exchange pulpits on a Home Mission Sunday. The Association secretary referred to this last suggestion in his report: "There seems to be a strange fear on the part of some ministers that the appointed preacher may preach worse than they do: may I assure them that such fears are groundless". In 1945 Young Baptist Associations were formed in East Kent, Mid-Kent and West Kent. An Association magazine, *The Link*, was issued in 1951 and after a somewhat uncertain start has established its place in the Association. Women's work has increased in effectiveness and greatly extended the range of its activities. In 1955 there were 89 women's meetings with 4,233 members and the number of Young Wives' groups was increasing. The women of our Association have not only served within our churches but have gone out into the community in the name of Christ to render service to children and the sick and elderly, and to share and often to take a leading part in the voluntary organisations of the community. There is a welcome tendency to replace the usual disconnected series of meetings by a carefully thought out programme of subjects.

In these post-war years there were a considerable number of small Baptist communities which were growing stronger and urgently needing more adequate premises. To help meet this need the Association in 1950 established a Church Extension Fund. It was hoped to raise £10,000 and, although only £7,000 were received, this sum together with an annual offering from the churches made it possible to give substantial help to the building ventures in the Association. It gave £2,310 to the

Crawley church, £1,000 to help the Gillingham church build a School Hall on the Twydall estate, £1,000 to the chapel at Moulsecoomb and £1,000 to the new place of worship at Chichester. It was able to help the building at Findon Valley, Halton and South Ashford. Many of the seventeen churches which joined the Association after the war received help from this source.

Sidley church became a member in 1948. The Bexhill Baptist church in 1907 took over work which the Methodists had been maintaining here, and carried it on with varied success until in 1948 a church was formed which became independent of the mother church in 1951. A new church was built in 1957. Towards the end of 1961 the pressing need for a minister was met after consultations with the Bexhill church by appointing an assistant to the Bexhill minister whose services, and expenses, could be shared by both churches. In 1950 the East Worthing church and the Halton church entered the Association. Work was started in East Worthing by an independent Baptist, but the work did not succeed and the building he erected was used as a store during the war. In 1946 the Worthing church purchased the property and appointed a deaconess to establish a cause there. It progressed, even if slowly, and a church was formed in 1950 with 54 members, and a grant from the Home Work Fund made it possible to invite a minister. The Halton church has a longer history. Preaching services were held here as early as 1854 and in 1867 a few members of the Hastings church hired a room for services and Sunday School, employing a bible woman to over-see the work. The need for larger premises was met by building a Hall in 1871. This was destroyed by a bomb in 1940. Premises were built in Priory Road, to be replaced in 1957 by the present building. The church was formed in 1950 with 31 members.

In 1951 the Hawkinge church became a member. The old name for Hawkinge was Uphill and it was known under this name for many years. The Uphill church formed in 1834 was an offshoot of the Folkestone church. It joined the Association in 1844 but resigned in 1855. It was carried on from 1852-1949 as a Union church, though this was contrary to the Trust Deeds, but in 1951 it was taken under the superintendence of the Folkestone church and led by a deacon from that

church. The new church at Chichester joined the Association in 1952. The ancient General Baptist church died out in 1815, and for nearly a century there was no organised Baptist community in the city and no provision was made for a Free Church in the three new estates that were developing round the city. After the war a number of Baptist families moved here and after meeting together for some months for worship they formed themselves into a church in 1951. Here again the Worthing church was active with encouragement, financial help and oversight. In the next seven years work was begun among children and young people and a Women's Fellowship started. Help from the Home Work Fund made it possible to invite a minister in 1957 and in the following year a church was built.

In 1954 the Moulsecoomb and Willesborough churches were received in. The Florence Road church had started a Sunday School in hired premises at Moulsecoomb in 1942 which in two years had drawn over 100 children together. Youth work and a Women's Meeting had been started when a deaconess was appointed in 1950, and a church of 22 members was formed in 1954. The need for their own premises was obvious and the Florence Road, Holland Road, Gloucester Place and Portslade churches took the cause under their wings, contributing £3,560 to the church that was built there in 1955. The work at Willesborough had been carried on for many years by the Ashford church. As far back as 1907 the Ashford friends had built a chapel there. A lay pastor was appointed in 1947 and the work so prospered that it became independent of the mother church in 1954. In the following year the Pevensey Bay Free church was formed and joined the Association. The Ceylon Place church, Eastbourne, began work here in 1906 and carried it on with the aid of lay preachers until the influx of Baptists into this growing seaside hamlet made it possible for an independent church to be formed. The work has been led since 1958 by a Baptist deaconess, Sister Lena Parkinson. The Trafalgar Road church, Horsham, joined the Association in 1956. The church was formed the year before with 10 members. It was in 1921 that the Horsham church initiated work here.

The Stoneham Road church joined the Association in 1957. The beginning of the work goes back to 1897 when Mr. Sadler, a deacon of the Holland Road church, gathered a group of

thirty youths who met in a stable loft. In 1901 the mission united with the Holland Road church, with a common membership, and the ministers and members of the church actively supported the work. In 1904 Stoneham Hall was built and an Annexe was added in 1931. The work prospered under the devoted leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Sadler and in 1945 there was a flourishing Sunday School, and many activities for men, women and youth, including a Boys' Brigade Company and a Life Boy Team of more than fifty. It began an independent life in 1956 and Mr. Sadler continued to lead the work until a minister was invited in 1958. The Crofton Baptist church was received into the Association in 1958. The Orpington church had begun work here in 1937, renting school premises for the purpose. A Hall was built in 1953 and a church of 58 members, all drawn from the mother church, was formed five years later. The membership had more than doubled by 1962. In 1959 two churches were added—Upper Beeding and Woodingdean. The former cause was started by Mr. T. D. Cross, a West Country farmer who moved in 1905 to Beeding Court Farm. He and his wife started a Sunday School which met in the farm kitchen and this was carried on for seven years, though much overcrowded. Then the Shoreham church, of which Mr. and Mrs. Cross were members, raised the money for a Hall and took over responsibility for the work. This church had made a previous attempt to establish a Baptist cause there, for it reported to the Association in 1885 that "our preaching station at Beeding has been relinquished because the building was unsafe". The work went steadily ahead after the war and an independent church of 21 members was formed in 1959 and the Rev. H. B. Simmance, the pastor of the Shoreham church, became their first minister. The church at Woodingdean arose from a group who held Gospel services there in 1923. Two years later they erected a temporary building and formed themselves into the Downs Free Church. About 40 people joined in the worship and a Sunday School was started. They built the present church in 1932. The work passed through some troubled years and eventually the property was handed over to the Baptist Union. The members then had dropped to ten but the brief Moderatorship of the Rev. E. F. Sutton brought new life to the cause and since then a steady work has been maintained.

Three newly formed churches joined in 1961—Hangleton Valley Free Church in Sussex and Marlpit Hill Church and Newington Free Church in Kent. It was the Holland Road church which sponsored the work in the developing area of Hangleton Valley. A site and a munificent gift of money were given and in 1956 work began, led by Sister Muriel Scott. A few children met in one of the day schools and a Young Wives' group gathered in private houses. The next year evening services began and in 1958 the Church Hall was opened. The cost of this was between £12,000 and £13,000, and by the time the building was opened all but £2,000 had been given, mostly by members of the Holland Road church. The earliest mention in the Association Year Books of Baptist work at Marlpit Hill is in 1887 when the Edenbridge church reports that the work there is being carried on by six young men from the mother church, that there were 70 children in the Sunday School, and that they needed more accommodation. Evidently this pioneer effort had been carried on for some time. Two years later the church reports that they were trying to clear off their debt on the Manse and on the new mission premises at Marlpit Hill. The Edenbridge church continued to support the work until 1924 when an independent church was formed with 23 members from the Edenbridge church. The Newington Free Church is situated in a new housing estate at Ramsgate. The work has been sponsored by the Free Churches of Ramsgate and Broadstairs. A Sunday School, meeting in a day school, was carried on from 1953 to 1963 when a church was formed and a place of worship built. The church of 34 members is affiliated to the Congregational and Baptist Unions.

Five churches left the Association—Peacehaven, Loose, Hadlow Down, which ceased to function in 1940, Biggin Hill, which was transferred to the L.B.A., and St. John's, Tunbridge Wells, which was sold to the Presbyterians in 1939. At the Spring Meetings of the Association in 1962 it was reported that the number of member churches had risen to 100, with 91 ministers in office.

It is instructive to examine the Association's statistics given in the years 1929-1962. The main facts are that in this period church members increased by 1,704 (10,209 to 11,913); Sunday School scholars decreased by 4,632 (12,899 to 8,267); B.M.S. gifts grew from £5,250 to £15,919.

The increase in church membership is heartening in view of the national decrease between 1931 and 1957 of 79,168 (406,216 to 327,048). The increase of membership in the Association was not steady. In 1938 it was nearly 11,000. It dropped in the next ten years to 9,660 and then steadily climbed to 11,913 in 1962. When the Rev. P. N. Bushill was secretary of the Association he drew attention to two features of our membership which he thought should cause us concern. The first was that, in 1942, for the first time in our history, the number received into our churches by testimony (116) exceeded those received in by baptism (83). This happened again three years later, and after 1954 the Year Book ceased to give these figures. But averaging the proportion in the last fourteen years that were recorded reveals that out of every seven members, three entered by testimony and four by baptism. Which means that there must be a large proportion of unbaptised members in our Baptist churches. The second fact which concerned him was the large number of withdrawals and erasures, which varied between 2½% and 3½% of our total membership. In the years 1948 to 1954 the average loss was 260 a year. There is a sad failure revealed here in the quality of our church life, a lack of real concern and genuine fellowship. It is gratifying that our membership has grown steadily in the last fourteen years and is higher than it has ever been. Yet it is salutary that we should be mindful of our many advantages. There has been a considerable movement of population from the Northern to the Southern counties, and apart from this, more and more London workers have moved into our area to live. In addition, we have a long coast line. Nearly 50 of our churches are on or very near the coast, and prove a strong attraction for Baptists in their retirement. An average of 47% of the new members received into these churches are transferred from other churches, and in some cases very few of the local inhabitants are brought into the life of the church.

The Sunday School figures also fluctuate. The national figures show a steady decline after 1910, and between 1931 and 1957 they dropped by 168,497 (479,193-310,696). The Association churches dropped 2,154 in that period (12,628-10,474). In 1930 there were 12,891 scholars and almost every year until 1944 there was a decrease and the number came down to 7,749. Then the numbers rose each year, sometimes quite

considerably, so that in 1955 there were 12,161 registered, almost back to the 1930 figure. But this was not maintained and in seven years the numbers had dropped to 8,267. This is most disappointing after the effort put into the Mid Century Crusade of 1949 to 1951 and the four years Children and Youth Campaign which began in 1953.

The list of churches which follows and the numbers of members and scholars are taken from the 1962 Year Book. The figures should be compared with those of 1929.

	Mem.	*Schol.*
CANTERBURY DISTRICT		
Ashford	233	348
Beltinge	35	29
South Ashford		
Birchington	83	49
Brabourne	23	39
Broadstairs	339	130
St. Peter's, Broadstairs	30	24
Canterbury	274	190
Aylesham	44	90
Deal	95	56
Dover	232	120
Eythorne	116	115
Faversham	78	57
Folkestone	256	195
Cheriton	90	83
Hawkinge	14	30
Herne Bay	267	87
Margate	196	59
Ramsgate	191	74
Newington	34	117
Sittingbourne	193	196
Walmer	191	206
Whitstable	161	64
Willesborough	35	64
MAIDSTONE DISTRICT		
Bessels Green	51	50
Brasted	48	21
Bromley Common	101	75
Chatham	69	55
Crockenhill	46	30
Crofton	113	92
Eynsford	103	36
Gillingham	285	230
Gravesend	185	60
Green Street Green	101	61
Halling (Kent)	9	58
Maidstone	185	156
Orpington	258	135
Petts Wood	101	191
Rochester	155	65
Frindsbury	17	65
Sevenoaks	160	113
Sheerness	92	210
Shoreham (Kent)	16	2
Westerham Hill	49	51
West Malling	59	37
Yalding	9	36
BRIGHTON DISTRICT		
Aldwick	88	61
Bognor Regis	172	72
Brighton:		
Florence Road	242	122
Gloucester Place	138	47
Moulsecoomb	45	90
Preston Park	23	37
Woodingdean	34	86
Burgess Hill	56	115
Chichester	58	104
Crawley	169	212
Forest Row	78	24
Horsham:		
London Road	159	150
Trafalgar Road	36	28
Hove:		
Holland Road	552	95
Stoneham Road	58	61
Hangleton Valley	32	67

	Mem.	*Schol.*
Lewes	109	73
Littlehampton	68	88
Newhaven	59	106
Portslade	78	69
Seaford	95	53
Shoreham (Sussex)	146	237
Uckfield	34	45
Upper Beeding	44	66
Worthing:		
Christchurch Road	605	182
Broadwater	194	118
Durrington	130	132
East Worthing	68	40
West Worthing	357	141
Findon Valley	175	30
HASTINGS DISTRICT		
Battle	25	15
Bexhill:		
Beulah	234	70
Sidley	56	83
Eastbourne:		
Ceylon Place	129	6
Pevensey Bay	36	30
Victoria Drive	348	45
Edenbridge	71	69
Marlpit Hill	14	39
Goudhurst	20	30
Hastings	154	49
Halton	83	64
Hawkhurst	64	77
Headcorn	9	17
Heathfield	155	116
Horsmonden	29	56
New Romney	27	7
Pembury	64	65
Rye	69	76
St. Leonard's	119	67
Sandhurst	17	20
Smarden	17	18
Tenterden	81	30
Tonbridge	251	119
Tunbridge Wells	273	176
Willingdon	93	44

CHAPTER XV

THE FINAL SUMMARY

THIS account of Baptist Associations in Kent and Sussex has extended over three centuries. In this period there have been two major Associations, the Association of General Baptist churches, and the later Association of Particular Baptist churches.

1. THE GENERAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

1657 The Kentish Association.
1657 is the date of the earliest extant records, but it was in existence before this date.

1659-1689 Years of persecution when Association life became impossible.

1708 The Kent and Sussex Association.
This is the re-formed Kentish Association. 1708 is the date of the earliest records but it was re-formed some years earlier.

1717 Divided into a West Kent and an East Kent Association.

W. Kent E. Kent

1768 The Kent Association.
This is the West and East Kent Associations re-united and re-organised. The Sussex churches are not included.

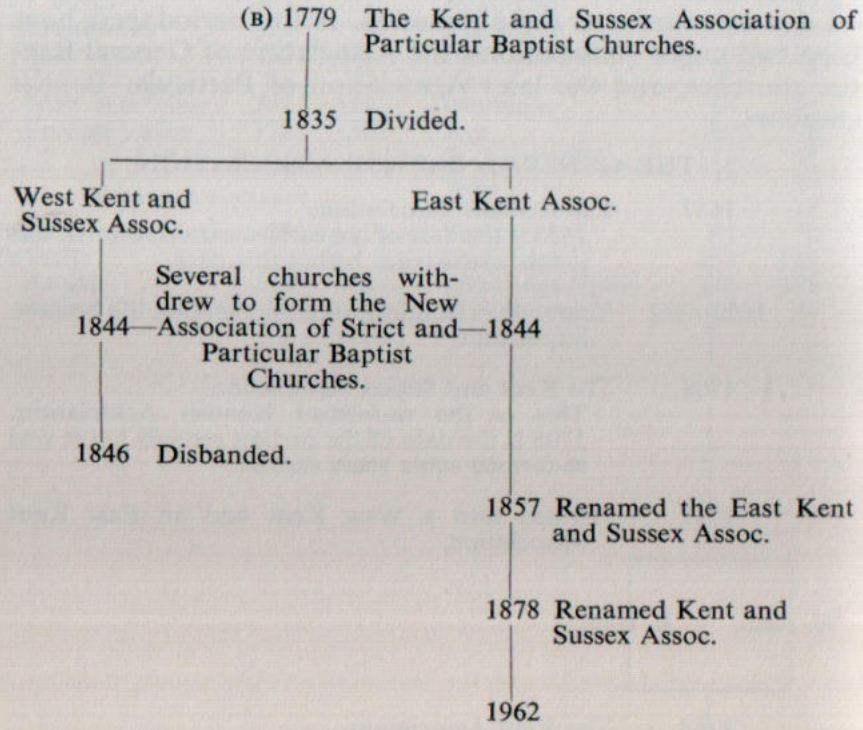
1825 By this date all the member churches were Unitarian, but the Association continued to meet until 1856.

Ten members of this Association survive until to-day. Two

of them, Headcorn and Smarden, are now members of the present Kent and Sussex Association. The remaining eight are Unitarian churches in Bessels Green, Billingshurst, Chatham, Ditchling, Dover, Horsham, Lewes and Northiam.

2. THE PARTICULAR BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

(A) 1700 A small number of churches formed a Kent Association. This was short-lived and ceased to function probably by 1719.


(B) 1779 The Kent and Sussex Association of Particular Baptist Churches.
1835 Divided.
West Kent and Sussex Assoc.
East Kent Assoc.
Several churches withdrew to form the New
1844 Association of Strict and Particular Baptist Churches.
1844
1846 Disbanded.
1857 Renamed the East Kent and Sussex Assoc.
1878 Renamed Kent and Sussex Assoc.
1962

For more than fifty years these two Associations existed side by side, just as in many towns and villages a General Baptist church and a Particular Baptist church carried on their separate existence. It is sometimes difficult to know whether references to a Baptist church in a certain place refer to a General or to a Particular Baptist church. A few of the Particular Baptist churches were formed by those who had always held Particular Baptist beliefs, but most of them were

formed of small groups who withdrew from General Baptists to form a Particular Baptist church. A few General Baptist churches moved as complete churches into the Particular Baptist fold, among them the Bessels Green, Eythorne and Headcorn churches.

The formation in 1944 of the New Association of Strict and Particular churches created a division between Baptists which has never been healed. In England and Wales there are a few more than 500 Strict Baptist churches and 97 of these are in Kent and Sussex. Their Association was short-lived but their churches remain, and the gulf between their 97 churches and the 100 churches of the Kent and Sussex Association is at least as wide as that between the General and Particular Baptists of the eighteenth century. Fellowship or co-operation are rarely experienced. We have not far to go to find the "unhappy divisions" we deplore in our prayers.

The Kent and Sussex Association founded in 1779 stated that its purpose was twofold, both to draw ministers and churches together in friendship and understanding and to aid each other in the work of God. The 1835 Association adopted this statement of purpose and we have seen to what degree it achieved these ends. It has certainly made possible friendly intercourse between ministers and to a lesser extent between churches. In an area as widespread as Kent and Sussex this intercourse is most effective in the Districts. Here ministers get to know one another well and the churches have more opportunity of meeting. But the mere fact of giving ministers and other church members the opportunity to meet their fellow Baptists is not sufficient to hold an Association together. This is one of the reasons why the 1708 and 1717 Associations faltered and it may well have been one of the major causes of the breakdown of the Particular Baptist Association in 1846. It is when the Association seeks to achieve its second main purpose of enabling the churches to aid each other in the work of God that it justifies its existence. This the Kent and Sussex Association has done from its first meeting in 1835 when it established an Association Fund to make it possible to open up new work, and formed a Baptist Missionary Society for East Kent. Through its Home Missionary Society it established evangelism as the churches' primary task. In its normal activities and through the challenge of special campaigns it

repeatedly united the member churches in vigorous efforts to convert the unconverted. It is because the churches fully recognised that they have been able to achieve as an Association what they could never have accomplished as individual churches that the Association has become an integral part of their lives. The life of each church is enriched by its share in the life of all the churches. The churches, the Association, and in the last century the Baptist Union, have become inextricably united.

What of the future? It is unthinkable to us that the Kent and Sussex Association should falter and fail as some previous Associations have done. Yet an Association must continue to justify its existence. Churches will not give their faith and loyalty to a cause or an organisation which is ineffective. This means that those who lead an organisation should shun complacency as they shun the devil, and from time to time should cast a critical eye upon every facet of Association life, not least on the methods we use to achieve our twofold purpose. We have no need to alter that purpose but a changing world may call for changing methods of attaining it. Another feature which needs to be scrutinised carefully is the tendency to increase the machinery of the Association. Since this century began committee has been added to committee, department to department, and some of these are paralleled in the Districts. A colossal amount of time is spent in committee work by ministers and lay folk. There are more and more organisations to draw ministers away from the central tasks for which they were ordained. All of our committees appear to be essential, but it would be healthy to subject them periodically to close examination to make sure that they are really necessary or that they could not function as effectively with fewer members.

Not many names have been mentioned in these pages, and most of these are the names of ministers and others who have taken a prominent part in Association life. That is inevitable in a work of this character. But one cannot read the records of these centuries without being made vividly aware of the devotion, sacrifice and godly witness of the unnamed believers who are the substance of our churches. One thinks of secretaries and treasurers and deacons who served their churches for half a century or more, of local preachers who year after

year tramped long miles in all weathers to lead men in the worship of God, of the vast host of Sunday School teachers who week by week turned the thoughts of the children to their Saviour, and of those who by the Christian quality of their lives bore effective witness to the grace of God in home and factory and church. Both the named and the unnamed have their place of honour in the life of our churches and therefore in the history of the Association which is composed of those churches. We thank God for them, and for ourselves we pray that insight into His will, that readiness to obey the leading of His Spirit and that dedication of mind and heart which make a church to live and enable an Association to fulfil its function of uniting churches in friendship and aiding them to do more effectively the work of God's Kingdom.

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[9] F. W. Butt Thompson, Baptist Historical Society, Vol. I, and Baptist Quarterly, Vol. XVII.
[10] Baptist Historical Society, V, p. 115.
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[12] A. C. Underwood, Baptist History, p. 54f.
[13] E. A. Payne, Short History of the Baptist Union, p. 182.
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History of the Free Christian Church at Horsham, Emily Kensett.
The story of an old meeting house (Lewes), L. M. Connell.
Histories of 48 other Kent and Sussex Baptist churches.

MODERATORS

1835	Rev. J. P. Briscoe	Folkestone
1836	Rev. E. Davis	Deal
1837	Rev. D. Crambrook	Dover (Pentside)
1838	Rev. D. Pledge	Margate
1839	Rev. T. Scott	Brabourne
1840	Rev. E. Davis	Deal
1841	Rev. J. P. Hewlett	Dover (Salem)
1842	Rev. W. Copley	Eythorne
1843	Rev. W. H. Denman	Faversham
1844	Rev. D. Parkins	Folkestone
1855	Rev. J. M. Daniell	Ramsgate
1846		
1847	T. Scott	Brabourne
1848		
1849	Rev. F. Wills	Ramsgate
1850		
1851	Rev. F. Wills	Ramsgate
1852	Rev. T. S. Baker	Deal
1853	Rev. F. Bosworth	Dover (Salem)
1854	Rev. C. Kirtland	Canterbury
1855	Rev. W. B. Davies	Margate
1856	Rev. J. Brook	Broadstairs
1857	Rev. D. Jones	Folkestone
1858	Rev. J. Haycroft	Lewes
1859	Rev. B. C. Etheridge	Ramsgate
1860	Rev. C. Kirtland	Canterbury
1861	Rev. J. C. Fishbourne	Hastings
1862	Rev. A. Ibberson	Dover (Salem)
1863	Rev. C. W. Skemp	Eythorne
1864	No meetings	
1865	Mr. J. B. Flint	Margate
1866	Rev. J. Wilkins	Brighton (Queen Square)
1867	Rev. A. W. Heritage	Canterbury
1868	Rev. W. Sampson	Folkestone
1869	Rev. W. Barker	Hastings
1870	Rev. J. H. Wood	Sandhurst
1871	Rev. B. C. Etheridge	Ramsgate
1872	Rev. J. Jackson	Sevenoaks
1873	Rev. R. Makin	Sittingbourne
1874	Rev. J. Drew	Margate
1875	Rev. W. Sampson	Folkestone
1876	Rev. W. Barker	Hastings
1877	Rev. J. Wilkins	Brighton (Queen Square)

1878	Rev. J. Aldis	Canterbury
1879	Mr. J. Bickle	Hastings
1880	Rev. E. J. Edwards	Dover (Salem)
1881	Rev. J. Doubleday	Sittingbourne
1882	Rev. G. Stanley	Eythorne
1883	Rev. J. S. Geale	Brighton (Queen Square)
1884	Rev. F. S. W. Wood	Ramsgate (Ellington)
1885	Mr. W. Fagg	Folkestone
1886	Rev. N. Dobson	Deal
1887	Rev. E. Roberts	Ashford
1888	Rev. T. Hancocks	Chatham
1889	Rev. G. Walker	Maidstone
1890	Rev. J. Drew	Margate
1891	Rev. W. H. Powell	Edenbridge
1892	Rev. W. Osborne	Eastbourne
1893	Rev. R. F. Jeffrey	Folkestone
1894	Rev. N. Dobson	Deal
1895	Rev. W. Townsend	Canterbury
1896	Rev. E. J. Edwards	Dover
1897	Rev. J. S. Geale	Brighton (Queen Square)
1898	Rev. J. Whitaker	Ashford
1899	Rev. David Davies	Hove (Holland Road)
1900	Rev. W. W. Blocksidge	Gillingham
1901	Mr. Fortescue West	Canterbury
1902	Rev. J. McAuslane	Crawley
1903	Mr. S. J. Hart	Chatham
1904	Rev. J. C. Carlile	Folkestone
1905	Rev. D. J. Llewellyn	Brighton (Florence Road)
1906	Rev. W. Usher	Tunbridge Wells (St. John's)
1907	Mr. F. J. Godden	Canterbury
1908	Rev. J. Doubleday	Sittingbourne
1909	Rev. W. D. Ross	Brighton (Gloucester Place)
1910	Mr. G. H. Dean	Sittingbourne
1911	Rev. G. A. Miller	Rochester
1912	Dr. F. B. Lewis	St. Leonards-on-Sea
1913	Rev. W. Holyoak	Dover
1914	Rev. J. P. Morris	Lewes
1915	Rev. J. J. Knight	Margate
1916	Rev. J. H. Marshall	Crockenhill
1917	Rev. T. R. McNab	Tonbridge
1918	Rev. T. R. McNab	Tonbridge
1919	Mr. G. Ellis	Rye
1920	Rev. W. L. Mackenzie	Deal
1921	Rev. W. R. Chesterton	Worthing (Christchurch Road)
1922	Rev. T. Hancocks	Ramsgate (Cavendish)
1923	Mr. C. J. Burgess	Walmer
1924	Rev. J. Lewis	Crawley
1925	Rev. J. T. Castle	St. Peter's
1926	Rev. A. D. Garrow	Brighton (Gloucester Place)
1927	Mr. W. G. Sargeant	Newhaven
1928	Rev. J. B. Payne	Tunbridge Wells

1929	Rev. F. Thompson	Hove
1930	Mr. Troward Harvey	Deal
1931	Rev. J. Daniel	Walmer
1932	Rev. W. A. Weeks	Ashford
1933	Rev. T. W. Hart	Brighton (Florence Road)
1934	Rev. P. A. Clements	Margate
1935	Rev. A. M. Ritchie	Canterbury
1936	Mr. S. Kendon	Goudhurst
1937	Rev. P. A. Hudgell	Bognor Regis
1938	Mrs. L. Lefevre	Canterbury
1939	Rev. S. G. Tweed	Dover
1940	Rev. W. D. Ross	Brighton (Gloucester Place)
1941	Rev. H. J. Warner	Tunbridge Wells
1942	Mr. J. S. Williams	Seaford
1943	Rev. W. L. Mackenzie	Broadstairs
1944	Rev. P. N. Bushill	Orpington
1945	Rev. Harcourt Samuel	Ramsgate
1945	Mr. W. H. Parker	Brighton (Gloucester Place)
1947	Rev. S. F. Field	Tonbridge
1948	Mr. S. Walter	Worthing
1949	Rev. V. C. Evans	Canterbury
1950	Rev. H. W. Janisch	Worthing (Christchurch Road)
1951	Mr. E. Vinson	Faversham
1952	Rev. C. J. Pike	Gillingham
1953	Rev. W. T. Cork	Folkestone
1954	Mr. A. A. Ramsbottom	Brighton (Florence Road)
1955	Rev. G. Cumming	Eastbourne (Victoria Drive)
1956	Rev. F. J. Coward	Orpington
1957	Rev. H. E. Stickler	West Worthing
1958	Mr. O. M. Kemp	St. Leonard's
1959	Rev. S. G. N. Nash	Tunbridge Wells
1960	Rev. E. G. Rudman	Hove (Holland Road)
1961	Rev. H. P. Simmance	Upper Beeding
1962	Rev. A. Stockwell	Whitstable
1963	Rev. J. Hair	Brighton (Florence Road)

OFFICERS

GENERAL SECRETARIES

Rev. J. M. Cramp	St. Peter's	1835-1842
Rev. J. P. Hewlett	Dover	1842-1849
Rev. D. Jones	Folkestone	1849-1859
Rev. B. C. Etheridge	Ramsgate	1859-1874
Rev. J. Drew	Margate	1874-1890
Rev. N. Dobson	Deal	1890-1905
Rev. W. Holyoak (for Kent) / Rev. J. McAuslane (for Sussex)	Dover / Crawley	1905-1909
Rev. W. Holyoak (for Kent) / Rev. J. P. Morris (for Sussex)	Dover / Lewes	1909-1913
Rev. J. Lewis (for Kent) / Rev. J. P. Morris (for Sussex)	Canterbury / Lewes	1913-1921
Rev. J. Lewis	Canterbury	1921-1939
Rev. P. N. Bushill	Orpington	1939-1943
Mr. J. S. Williams	Seaford	1943-1946
Rev. P. N. Bushill	Seaford	1946-1954
Rev. W. T. Cork	Folkestone	1954-1964

TREASURERS

Mr. W. Parnell	Ashford	1835-1836
Mr. W. Stace	Folkestone	1836-1839
Mr. W. H. Stace	Folkestone	1839-
1840-1852 *not known*		
Rev. F. Wills	Ramsgate	-1853
Rev. C. Kirtland	Canterbury	1853-1854
Mr. J. B. Flint	Margate	1854-1874
Mr. T. E. Slaughter	Sandhurst	1874-1882
Mr. G. H. Dean	Sittingbourne	1882-1925
Mr. G. Wellden	Walmer	1925-1930
Mr. T. S. Harvey	Deal	1930-1937
Rev. W. L. Mackenzie	Broadstairs	1937-1945
Mr. W. G. Sergeant	Newhaven	1946-1957
Mr. E. Vinson	Faversham	1957-

GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS

Rev. T. Woodhouse	1915-1930
Rev. S. G. Morris	1931-1934
Rev. H. H. Sutton	1934-1946
Rev. W. D. Jackson	1946-1954
Rev. H. V. Larcombe	1954-1960
Rev. V. C. Evans	1961-

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Ashford 14, 29, 30, 78.
Bessels Green 15, 31, 41, 43, 44, 45, 66.
Biddenden 18, 22, 31, 32.
Billingshurst 60, 65.
Birchington 25.
Canterbury 14, 31, 33, 36, 39, 44, 45, 66.
Chatham 18, 32, 39, 47, 66.
Chichester 15, 28, 31, 65.
Cranbrook 25, 31, 39, 65, 66.
Cuckfield 65.
Deal 22, 31, 33, 39, 41, 44, 47, 66.
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Eythorne 14, 31, 33, 39, 41.
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Birchington 91, 125.
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Brighton:
  Bond Street 52, 84.
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  Sussex Street 100, 104, 120.
  Woodingdean 142.
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  Queen's Road 109.
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  Tabernacle 110.
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  Trafalgar Road 141.
Horsmonden 121.

Hove:
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  Holland Road 100, 104, 141, 143.
  Stoneham Road 141.
Lewes 51, 52, 81.
Littlehampton 121.
Loose 100, 110, 135, 143.
Maidstone:
  King Street 66, 72, 103.
  Knightrider Street 100, 103.
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  Calverly Road 100, 103.
  Hanover 79, 82, 84.
  St. John's 114, 143.
Uckfield 119.
Upper Beeding 142.
Uphill 90, 91, 140 (see Hawkinge).
Wadhurst 74, 84.
Walmer 121.
Westerham Hill 131.
West Malling 54, 82, 103.
Whitstable 108.
Willesborough 141.
Willingdon 132.
Wivelsfield 28, 49, 51, 73, 84.
Worthing:
  Broadwater 131.
  Christchurch Road 105, 130, 131, 132, 135, 140.
  Durrington 135.
  East Worthing 140.
  West Worthing 130, 131.
Yalding 110, 111.